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Vol. 9 No. 3
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## Upcoming in alt.theatre

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**FLOYD FAVEL** on the attempted censorship on the Poundmaker reserve of an adaptation of Sophocle's *Antigone*—a play about corruption and the abuse of political power that then-Chief Antoine, already under fire from charges of unaccountable leadership and financial irregularities, took as a personal attack (code-name "Antoine Gone").

**DISPATCH**
**SAVANNAH WALLING** on weathering the storms of a funding climate change that is decimating arts infrastructure in British Columbia.

**BOOK REVIEW**
**AIDA JORDÃO** on Alan Filewod's *Committing Theatre: Theatre Radicalism and Political Intervention in Canada.*

Vol. 9 No.3

EDITORIAL

8 **The Bits that Don't Quite Fit!**
by Edward Little

ARTICLES

10 **Building Bridges across Time: Headlines Theatre's** *Us and Them (the Play)*
Seth Soulstein on how Headline Theatre's "Us and Them" project used the Vancouver Stanley Cup riots as a starting point to explore how both individuals and communities build walls—and to help us dismantle them.

IMAGES BY DAVID COOPER

17 **Never Stop Acting Up— The Power of One's Voice**
Jessica Abdallah shares the diverse and engaging voices of playwrights at Black Theatre Workshop's conference: Since Mama Done Got Off the Couch!

24 **Report from Ireland: Cultural diversity on the stage?**
Natalie Harrower assesses the extent to which Irish theatre reflects the culturally diverse landscape of contemporary Ireland.

IMAGES BY FIONA MORGAN WWW.FIONAMORGAN.IE & HUGH O'CONOR WWW.HUGHOCONOR.COM

31 **The Aesthetic of Violence through Dance and Theatre: Looking at Aparna Sindhoor's** *Encounter*
Alexandra Martin considers the issue of representing violence, war, and armed conflict through aestheticized art forms in her review of *Encounter*, a collaboration between Navarasa Dance Theater and Teesri Duniya Theatre.

IMAGES BY GANESH RAMACHANDRAN WWW.PURPLEGANESH.COM

35 **An Act of Healing: Playwrights Dale Lakevold and Darrell Racine on** *Misty Lake*
Twelve years after the play's premier, Lakevold and Racine talk about the genesis and the ongoing relevance of *Misty Lake*.

IMAGES BY ELIZABETH BEAR AND DEREK GUNNLAUGSON

DISPATCH

39 **Place Matters**
Leanore Lieblein on the Ex Machina and the Huron-Wendat Nation's environmentally staged co-production of *Tempest*.

IMAGE BY RENAUD PHILIPPE

BOOK REVIEW

40 Michelle MacArthur reviews *Nightwood Theatre: A Woman's Work Is Always Done*, by Shelley Scott.

POEM

43 *Eulogy for Madeleine Parent*
By David Fennario

**** **** **** **** **** ****

# Call for applications

## for the position of Editor-in-chief

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*alt.theatre* is a professional journal published quarterly by Teesri Duniya Theatre. The Editor-in-chief reports to the Board of Teesri Duniya Theatre and is responsible for all aspects of the editorial content of the magazine, including writing editorials, ensuring a steady stream of submissions, managing the receipt and assessment of articles, making final decisions regarding revisions and intention to publish, overseeing copy editing and graphic layout, and ensuring that the magazine is published on schedule. An editorial board assists the editor in identifying, soliciting, and vetting content. The editor-in-chief also works in partnership with Teesri Duniya's general manager on magazine-related grant-writing, advertising, revenue strategies, pricing, costs, and circulation management.

The position offers considerable opportunity for team-building, growth, and the development of a unique editorial vision and voice. The ideal candidate will have superior writing and editing skills, strong connections to culturally diverse theatre artists and practices in Canada and abroad, and a deep interest in building upon the solid intellectual and aesthetic foundations already established by *alt.theatre*. This is a one-year initial appointment subject to longer term renewal based on clear evidence of achievement. Remuneration during the initial appointment will be $2,500 per issue, subject to review in subsequent years as funding permits. Affiliation with a university is not required, although the institutional support provided by such a position would be an asset. The editor may serve from any location; residency in Montreal is not required.

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alt.theatre
cultural diversity and the stage.

Vol. 9 No.3

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

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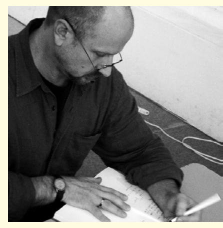
## EDITORIAL



### EDWARD (TED) LITTLE

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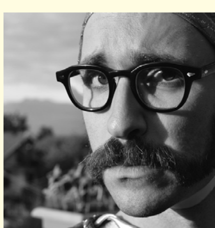
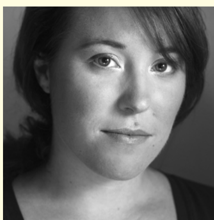
## ARTICLES



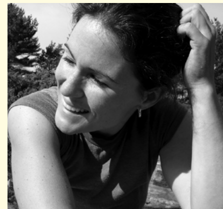
### SETH SOULSTEIN

is a playwright, actor, and activist. Starting this fall, after having completed an MA in Theatre Studies at the University of British Columbia, he will be working towards a PhD in Theatre Arts at Cornell University. He is particularly interested in the ways in which theatrical works and artists can inspire audiences to take action outside of the event itself. His sketch comedy ensemble, the Late Night Players, toured the US from 2003 to 2009. In 2004, he co-founded the Harry Potter Alliance, a non-profit organization aimed at engaging youth in social justice by seeking inspiration from modern storytelling.



### JESSICA ABDALLAH

is an actor, coordinator, teacher, and director. Jessica is a graduate of Concordia University's Theatre and Development (Montréal), and recently finished her MFA in Directing at the University of Alberta. She is currently developing a play about Sedna, the northern goddess of the sea. Favourite directing credits include a bilingual production of *Dark Owl* (Tableau D'Hôte), *Annie Mae's Movement* (UofA), *The Dangers of Proposing: Two Chekhov Farces* (UofA), and *Rapture!* (Edmonton Fringe Festival).



### NATALIE HARROWER

moved to Ireland in 2009 as a postdoctoral researcher on the Irish Theatrical Diaspora's Internationalization of Irish Drama project, after completing her PhD at the Centre for Drama, Theatre, and Performance Studies at the University of Toronto. Her current research interests include new Irish theatre, Irish film, queer performance, and performance in public spaces. Natalie has taught theatre and film at the University of Toronto and at Queen's University, Kingston, and will be teaching at Trinity College, Dublin, in the upcoming academic year.

### ALEXANDRA MARTIN

holds a MA in museology and a BA in anthropology from Université de Montréal. Her research interests include the representation of cultural minorities in public institutions such as museums, and the use of museums by marginalized groups. She is also interested in the transmission of history and memory through literature, visual arts, and theatre.

### DALE LAKEVOLD's

plays include *Wild Geese* and *Cross Creek* (University of Winnipeg), *Stretching Hide*, *L-Love's Body* and *Never Never Mind*, *Kurt Kurt Cobain* (Theatre Projects Manitoba), and *Making L-Love's Body* (Brandon University). His audio theatre installation *Notes for a Speech on (Canadian) Flagmaking* was produced at the Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba in 2003. He was nominated for the 1999 John Hirsch Award for Most Promising Writer in Manitoba. He teaches English at Brandon University.

### DARRELL RACINE's

play *Misty Lake*, co-written with Dale Lakevold, has had eight productions across Western Canada and was published in 2006 by Loon Books. His play *Stretching Hide*, also co-written with Dale Lakevold, was produced by Theatre Projects Manitoba and published by Scirocco Drama in 2007. He is a graduate of Harvard, Cambridge, and Oxford. He is a Metis from the Turtle Mountains in Manitoba and teaches Native Studies at Brandon University.

DISPATCH

***LEANORE LIEBLEIN***

is the editor of *A Certain William: Adapting Shakespeare in Francophone Canada* (Playwrights Canada Press, 2009). In 2007 she was curator of the "Pourquoi Shakespeare?" section of the "Shakespeare—Made in Canada" exhibition at the MacDonald Stewart Art Centre in Guelph, Ontario. A former professor of English, now retired from McGill University, her research has focused on early modern and contemporary theatre, especially the staging of plays with a long stage history.

BOOK REVIEW

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POEM

***DAVID FENNARIO***

is a playwright/performer, social activist, and former weekly columnist for the *Montreal Gazette*. Award-winning plays published by Talonbooks: *On The Job* and *Balconville* (Chalmers 1976, 1980), *Joe Beef* (Prix Pauline-Julien 1986), *Death of René Lévesque (Montreal Gazette*, 2003 Play of the Year). Twice profiled by the NFB, his plays have been televised on CBC and Bravo. His 1974 memoir *Without a Parachute*, republished as *Sans parachute* (2010), won poet Gilles Hénault a Governor General's Award for translation. Fennario was the 2007 candidate for Québec solidaire in Vielle Verdun, where he was born and still resides.

*Editorial*

# The Bits that Don't Quite Fit!

BY EDWARD LITTLE

It's spring, and this not-so-young-man's fancy is turning to thoughts of the costs of austerity signaled by our federal budget. Bev Oda sips $16 orange juice before retiring to her luxury bedroom in London's Savoy Hotel; Tony "please-sir-the-oil-patch-needs-some-more" Oliver pledges to crack down on environmental opposition so he can ram a pipeline up our pristine wilderness; and I worry that our stealthy F-35 prime minister Stephen (Pyramus?) Harper and his chief of staff Nigel (Thisbe?) Wright are speaking to each other through a crack in the "ethical wall" erected due to Wright's corporate connections to the largest military procurement in Canadian history (O'Keefe). What with Robocalls, charges of voter suppression, electoral misconduct, and federal "Info Alerts" implying that dear old friends like David Suzuki are environmental radicals supported by foreign interests is it any wonder I'm having a difficult time getting it up for love this spring?

But while the feds are having second thoughts about their lust for attack planes, their love affair with stealth, information control, and suppression of dissent continues unabated. National and international media charge that our government scientists are being "muzzled" ("Frozen out"; Munro); mining companies are exploiting a little-known clause in effluent regulations to reclassify healthy wild lakes as "tailings impoundment areas" (Casey); and sweeping changes to immigration, environmental law, and fisheries protection are being cloaked within the ostensibly innocuous "budget implementation" legislation designed to fast-track passage and ensure that review priority will be given to a Commons finance committee (Weston). Bill C-38—the jobs, growth and long-term prosperity act—would replace the Environmental Assessment Act in its entirety, eliminate a key watchdog of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, make substantial changes to the Immigration Act, and amend the Fisheries Protection Act to label fish either "valuable" or "non-valuable" (Nikiforuk, "Don't"). In the suppression of dissent category, one of the few growth sectors in the budget pertains to an $8M allocation to fund "education and compliance" relating to political activities by charities (Dembicki). Currently charities can spend up to 10% of their budgets on political advocacy; however, Environment Minister Peter Kent is concerned that environmental groups are "laundering money" from "offshore foreign funds for inappropriate use against Canadian interest" (Paris). If Kent needs some expertise to help him see how red, black, and grey ink can be made to change colour, I recommend Publish What You Pay Norway. PWPN's recent study found that 34.5% of the 6,038 subsidiaries owned by the world's top 10 extraction companies are located in tax havens and/or secrecy jurisdictions (Mathiason).

The feds claim a need for austerity and a focus on job creation. Yet the Canadian Labour Congress contends that the billions forfeited through corporate tax cuts that were supposed to create new jobs have instead prompted companies to hoard $477 billion in cash reserves, pay increased dividends to shareholders, and "beef up executive salaries" (Tencer). Greenpeace reports that in 2008 alone, oil companies in Canada received over $1.38 billion in federal subsidies–$18M more than the total budget for Environment Canada in 2008 (Stewart). Yet, as Mitchell Anderson points out, now, "in the midst of an oil boom, the richest province in confederation … can't seem to balance the books." To put this in perspective, the Frontier Centre for Public Policy pegs *corporate welfare* payouts in Canada at approximately $15.6 billion a year, with *social welfare* running around $8 billion (Lick). Furthermore, the National Council of Welfare—one of the organizations quietly disposed of in an attachment to the 2012 budget—advises that social welfare spending results in an overall saving of taxpayer dollars because what's spent with one hand, returns doubled to the other in the form of decreased costs for health care, education, unemployment insurance, and policing (Lick).

Budget watchdog Kevin Page advises that balancing the books by 2015-16 "will come at a cost of slow growth, delayed recovery," and *lost* jobs (Mas). The Canadian Association of University Teachers warns that the budget's emphasis on promoting a "short-term commercial agenda" will compromise research and hinder prosperity. While our government tells us that fast-tracking environmental approval is necessary so that jobs and prosperity can flow, many claim the job creation numbers are grossly inflated and that the vast majority of the jobs will flow *out* of Canada. The Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada—clearly not an opponent to development—estimates that the Keystone pipeline project alone would export 40,000 jobs to the US (May). Ed Stelmach characterizes "shipping raw bitumen … as scraping off the topsoil, selling it, and then passing the farm on to the next generation" (Steward). Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty warns that continuing to aggressively push resource development is "essentially telling Central Canada and the manufacturing sector 'You guys are toast'" (Krugel).

In spite of this, the Feds call it Responsible Resource Development (RRD). So why, a reasonable citizen might ask, are they stifling debate and pursuing the strategies they used as a minority government—taking ground with "lightning-fast guerrilla raids," neutralizing opposition by defunding advocacy groups, and avoiding any attempts to rally public support? (Coyne). Former Clerk of the Privy

Council, Alex Himelfarb, warns that this budget is part of an inexorable "brick by brick" dismantling of the progressive state—"a milestone in transformative change" that points down a road where, if we want to see who will benefit, we need only look to "the twenties and thirties, a time of massive inequality and personal vulnerability which presaged the Great Depression." Andrew Nikiforuk, a self-proclaimed Christian and social conservative, calls for "transparency and full disclosure" in light of Harper's membership in the Protestant Christian and Missionary Alliance—an evangelical church that believes the free market to be "divinely inspired"—with doctrinal ties to the Cornwall Alliance, "a coalition of right-wing scholars, economists and evangelicals … that questions mainstream science, doubts climate change, views environmentalists as a 'native evil,' champions fossil fuels and supports libertarian economics" ("Understanding").

As Murray Dobbin points out, "the slogan for the free-traders was simple and repeated endlessly: there is no alternative. Of course there were alternatives, just none that the corporate state was going to allow." Articles in *alt.theatre* regularly engage with alternatives and social responses to historical colonialism and its contemporary incarnation as market fundamentalism sustained by a subaltern class suckled on the internalized ideology of neoliberal individualism. The articles in this issue are no exception.

Seth Soulstein writes of how Vancouver's Headlines Theatre applies grassroots-up approaches informed by systems theory to identify and counteract the alienation that occurs as we build the walls within ourselves and between ourselves and others to create "Us and Them." Jessica Abdallah's transcription of and commentary on the Black Theatre Workshop conference "Since Mama Done Got off the Couch" cites playwright George Elliott Clarke on the importance of history—of how the ruling classes exploit ignorance and use history as "a weapon" to ensure dominance. The theme of public history, narrative, and the ownership of stories is taken up in Darrell Racine and Dale Lakevold's interview on *Misty Lake*—a play about First Nations residential schools and the ways in which the institutionalized erasure of historical contexts of family, culture, and worldview effectively chokes off the healing that can only begin with acknowledging the injustices: "If you don't know how to suffer, then what happens is that the pain remains constant over time." Natalie Harrower's look at contemporary theatre in Ireland within the context of the hardships caused by the economic collapse of the "Celtic Tiger" includes a piece about the marginalization of "Travellers" (people who live in mobile caravans or trailers). Alexandra Martin considers the intentions and efficacy of aestheticized violence in Teesri Duniya's co-production of *The Encounter*—an anti-war dance theatre piece that takes up a story about anti-colonialist insurgency and struggle of indigenous peoples amidst militarism, racism, drought and scarcity. Leanore Lieblein's Dispatch on the Ex Machina and Huron-Wendat Nation's environmentally staged co-production of Shakespeare's *Tempest* considers the struggle for land, citizenship, and cultural and political autonomy. Michelle MacArthur's review of Shelley Scott's *Nightwood Theatre* praises the company's long-term "ability to respond to developments in feminist theory and embrace its pluralism"—a legacy that prompts further discussion about the complex balance between "playing in the mainstream and finding power in the margins." The last word in the issue is given to David Fennario and his eulogy to Quebec trade union activist and feminist Madeleine Parent (1918-2012).

And so back to the 2012 federal budget. I'm a bit worried that if the crackdown on what constitutes political activity by organizations receiving charitable donations results in the 10% rule being applied to individual articles in *alt.theatre*, this editorial will be in contravention. I'm looking for a conciliatory gesture. Yann Martel was in the habit of sending Canadian novels to Stephen Harper in the hope that they might somehow contribute to a national vision beyond fundamentalist economics. I was thinking that the PM might appreciate something from the world stage that speaks to austerity. Maybe *The Miser* by Molière—a play about a man obsessed with accumulating, hiding, and hoarding wealth even though it destroys his relationship with his family, his household, and the world. Then again, perhaps by retiring the Canadian penny, the PM hopes to render charges of "penny-pinching" meaningless.

In the words of the late Augusto Boal, "Have the courage to be happy."

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***ERRATUM***

In our December issue Vol 9.2 (September 2011), Marc Chalifoux's name was not listed as the photographer of the Ground Zero production images on pages 42 and 47. *alt.theatre* apologises for this omission.

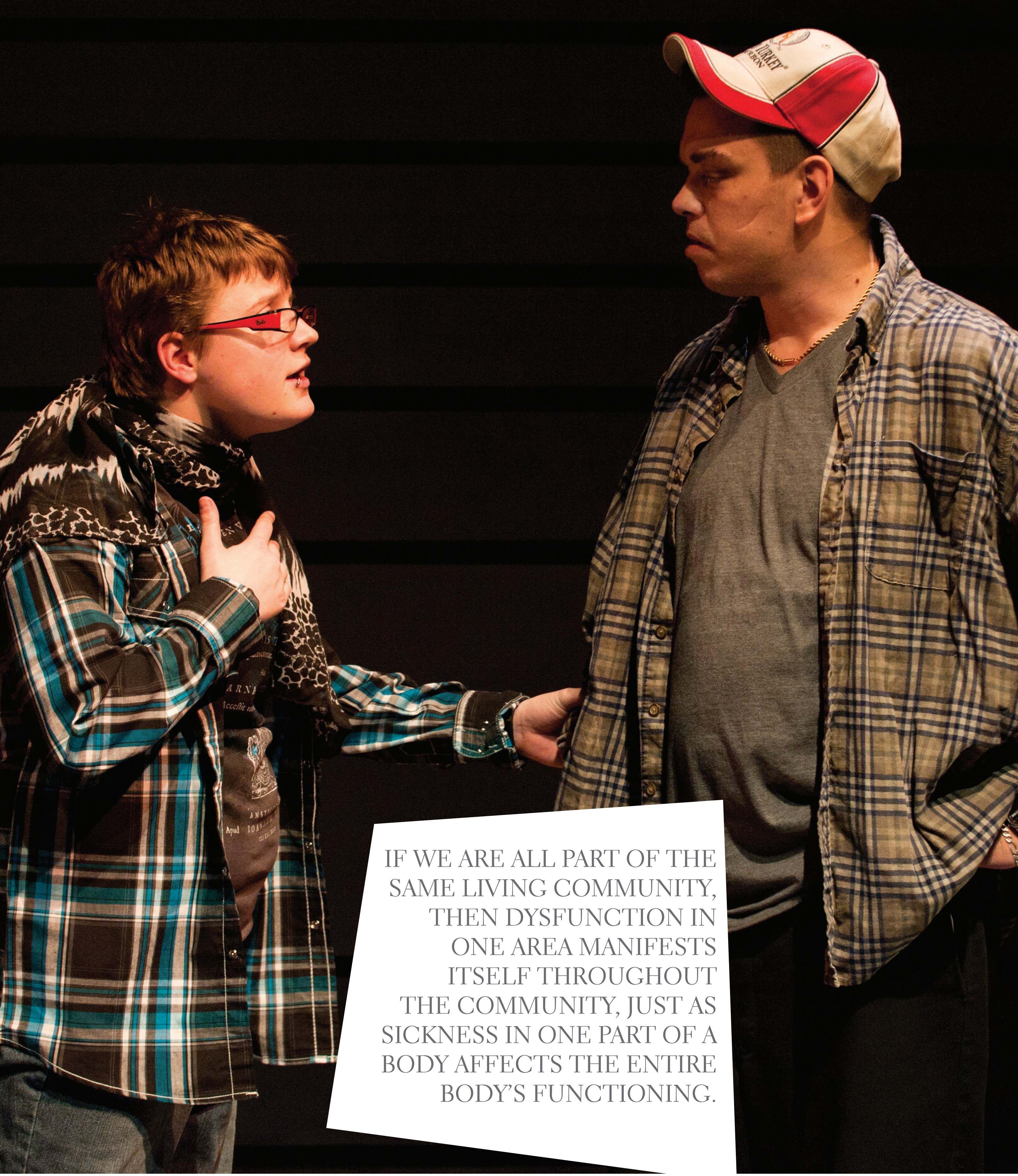
Muslim
Indian
Criminal

# BUILDING BRIDGES ACROSS TIME: HEADLINES THEATRE'S *US AND THEM (THE PLAY)*

BY SETH SOULSTEIN

© David Cooper / Actors: Reem Morsi, Brandy McCallum, Sundown Stieger, Iris Paradela-Hunter, Connor Polishak, and Casper LeBlanc

*About three quarters of the way through Vancouver's Headlines Theatre's most recent project, something unusual happened: a riot. Immediately following the deciding game of the Stanley Cup finals on June 15, 2011, the city's downtown core erupted into an unprecedented display of violence, aggression, and property destruction, leaving many in the city appalled by the actions of members of their own community. For many theatre projects, an event of this magnitude could serve as nothing more than a distraction, with the potential to minimize the public's interest in the themes the theatre company hopes to highlight. For Headlines, whose "Us and Them" project was a two-year exploration into how a community builds walls that separate people into categories, the riot and the response to it by the community were the perfect focal point through which to stage* **Us and Them (the Play)**, *the mainstage production that culminated the project, in October and November, 2011.*



IF WE ARE ALL PART OF THE SAME LIVING COMMUNITY, THEN DYSFUNCTION IN ONE AREA MANIFESTS ITSELF THROUGHOUT THE COMMUNITY, JUST AS SICKNESS IN ONE PART OF A BODY AFFECTS THE ENTIRE BODY'S FUNCTIONING.

Headlines practises Theatre for Living (TFL)—a descendant of Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed (TO)—which was created by Headlines' artistic and managing director, David Diamond, and codified in his book, *Theatre for Living: the art and science of community based dialogue*. As the book's title suggests, TFL is an approach to the art of theatre-making that grounds itself in scientific understanding, and the branch of scientific thought to which Diamond most consistently refers is systems theory. As Diamond proposes, "in the same way that our bodies are made up of cells that constitute the living organism, a community is made up of individual people that comprise the organism I call the living community" (*Theatre* 19). This approach fits right in line with physicist and systems theorist Fritjof Capra's claim (in the foreword to Diamond's book) that "the material world, ultimately, is a network of inseparable patterns of relationships" (qtd. in Diamond *Theatre* 14).

Together, these statements form the basis for Headlines' work, and especially for their "Us and Them" project. Through this lens, Headlines approaches their practice with the notion that a community crisis affects every member of that community, and conversely, that problems in the lives of individual members of a society impact the society as a whole; if we are all part of the same living community, then dysfunction in one area manifests itself throughout the community, just as sickness in one part of a body affects the entire body's functioning. The "Us and Them" project spoke to the core of this concept by illuminating the ways in which we draw distinctions between ourselves and others and ignore how our lives are intrinsically interconnected with the lives of others.

*Us and Them (the Play)* was the most ambitious piece of Forum Theatre I have ever seen. Not only were the production values quite high—with a beautiful, minimalist set (by Yvan Morisette), striking use of projected archival and original video footage (by Conor Moore), and a vivid soundscape (by Owen Belton)—but the structure of the play, as a forty-five-minute long Forum Theatre piece, was an innovative approach to the form. Typically, a Forum Theatre play (including those done by Headlines) is about twenty minutes in length. After a brief interlude with the Joker (e.g., emcee—Diamond, in this case), the cast begins the play again with an invitation to the audience to stop the action at any point, replace one of the actors, and try to ameliorate the situation at hand. This was not the case with *Us and Them (the Play)*.

Diamond, the cast, and co-director Kevin Finnan constructed a play so sweeping in scope that it couldn't possibly have been restarted from the beginning, for reasons of time if nothing else. Instead, we in the audience were offered an opportunity to "time travel." Upon completion of the first run of the play, Diamond came out and explained what would happen next: the cast would shortly begin to reenact the final scene. Meanwhile, a projection appeared of a "table of contents" for the rest of the play: a storyboard, with captions, broken down by scene. At any moment during the upcoming replay of the final scene, audience members were invited to stop the action and replace one of the characters—not just within that scene, but in any point of the play they wished to choose. The cast would quickly rearrange the set and prepare to start the scene with the audience member replacing one of the actors.[1]

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This innovative "time travel" approach had varying effects, most, if not all, of them positive. Some Forum Theatre events can feel like an insiders' club, with an audience made up largely of people who have previous Forum experience and know what to expect. Although this production avoided that dynamic, attracting a wide variety of audience members from throughout the Vancouver community, many people still seemed initially confused by this deviation from the traditional Forum structure, and were unable to connect the dots between how exactly a moment in the final scene could relate to a previous interaction. Typically, audience members watching Forum Theatre, seeing a character do or say something they see as flawed, are inspired to immediately raise their hand with a clear notion of what they would do differently. But this new invitation in *Us and Them (the Play)* made it initially harder to penetrate the action: Instead of looking for ways to work directly with the situation being currently presented on stage, audience members had to use the issues being played out in that scene to instigate interventions in earlier scenes. The audiences I was in took some time to warm up to this concept; on one evening, Diamond had to stop the re-enactment of the final scene and ask the actors to start it again from the beginning after a long time had gone by with the audience sitting silently, unable to find an entry point to the time travel.

Ultimately, however, this new structure proved worth the extra effort, largely because of how it related in an experiential way to the overall themes of the play and the project. This was much like the Rainbow of Desire-centered events of the project's first phase, *Us and Them (the Inquiry)*, a piece that took a frozen moment in time and asked the attendees to spend the entire evening examining all of the relationships, nuances, and dynamics within it. The decision in *Us and Them (the Play)* to ground the entire Forum in the final scene forced the audience to explore the ways in which all of the scenes, characters, and moments could be interrelated. As Diamond notes in his post-production final report, "One of the big responses coming from people is that they really appreciate how the play focuses into very small, sometimes seemingly inconsequential moments, and how the moments "open up" through the Forum. This is, of course, what we had hoped for" (Final Report 78).

By not putting everything up on stage a second time for the audience to react instinctually to, Headlines was forcing us to make these connections on our own—to look at seemingly isolated moments of conflict and find their roots in the characters' previous encounters. The time travel structure acted as a subtle form of *entrainment*, the first of three phases that Diamond borrows from systems theory[2] to explain the process of self- or community-transformation (*Theatre* 170). Through entrainment, we re-adjust our bodily and mental rhythms to fit the situation we find ourselves in. In this case, we had to re-focus our attention not to what was in front of us, but to *how what was in front of us connected to what was not*. With this in mind, the oftentimes-difficult transitional phase between the play and the Forum, in which Diamond explained the time travel concept, can be seen as an intentional challenge to the audience to refocus their minds from sheer observation to a deeper rhythm of connection. In his book, Diamond fittingly points out the precedent for this kind of challenge

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© David Cooper / Connor Polishak, Iris Paradela-Hunter, and Brandy McCallum

in Boal's work: "The goal of the *Theatre of the Oppressed* is not to create calm, equilibrium, but rather to create disequilibrium which prepares the way for action" (Boal qtd. in Diamond, *Theatre* 172).

Indeed, Diamond has no interest in making things too easy for his audience, and the payoff from working through the time travel process is substantial. Throughout the Forum, Diamond made sure to make note of the connections as well; when an intervention ended, he would often invite the audiences to think about the consequences of the spect-actor's alteration to the action. How does what has changed in this scene affect these characters by the end? How does it affect other characters? The audience was forced to experience personally one of the central themes of *Us and Them*: How to make deeper connections.

Two images were constantly present throughout the play and subsequent Forum: a wall and a bridge. The first and most obvious among these was the set, which was a single giant wall. To start the play, a series of projected images of untouched BC forest morphed into the Vancouver skyline, and then into footage of the hockey riots. The lights went up and the wall developed a new identity through more projected imagery. It became the Wall of Healing (also known as the Wall of Hope), an impromptu post-riot message board created on the boards covering businesses' smashed-in windows in the heart of Vancouver's downtown core. Vancouverites from all walks of life came to the Wall to make public their reaction to the riots—most commonly something to the effect of "I am from Vancouver too, and *they* (the rioters) are not *me*." It was the perfect place to stage an exploration into issues of "us" versus "them."

While the play's characters came from entirely different walks of life, and not all of them interacted with each other, they all found themselves in front of the Wall of Healing at some point during the forty-five minutes—and it is there they all wound up at the play's end. The six main characters represented, to varying degrees, a wide variety of Vancouver's residents: Ligaya, a Filipina immigrant (Iris Paradela-Hunter); Amina, a newly-arrived immigrant from Egypt and a Muslim (Reem Morsi); Steve, a middle class Caucasian (Connor Polishak); Joe, a First Nations man who has spent some time in jail (Sundown Stieger); Ashley, Joe's cousin who has moved to Vancouver to establish a life for herself apart from her Aboriginal community (Brandy McCallum); and Tanner, born female in a small town, now living in Vancouver as a transgendered man (Casper LeBlanc). Immediately following the play, Diamond asked audience members to raise their hands if they "recognized either themselves or loved ones in characters in the play"; by his estimate, 50-90% of the people in every audience did raise their hands, and after shows people would often come and tell him they didn't but should have, meaning the numbers were even higher (Diamond, Final Report 5). The characters were not caricatures in the slightest, not simply "right" or "wrong," but complicated people living complicated lives. As Diamond writes, "This wasn't a project about 'those homeless people' or 'those gang members' or 'those racists'. Each audience member was implicit in some aspect of the story in which there were no 'good' or 'bad' characters and for some, this was very challenging" (Final Report 7).

# BEYOND THE OMNIPRESENT EXISTENCE OF WALLS

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Some of them knew each other before the action of the play (Steve was Ashley's boyfriend, Ashley was Tanner's social worker, Joe and Ashley were cousins), some of them met on stage (Ligaya found Amina writing on the Wall of Healing, Tanner sat across a café from Ligaya and sketched her, Joe came in to apply for a job at the bar where Steve was manager), and some never met at all. What connected them all, though, was a tendency to build walls within themselves, separating them from other people (as, went the implication, we all do). It was this tendency that we were there to explore: Where do these walls come from? How do they manifest themselves? How can we break them down or otherwise overcome them?

In keeping with the previous approach, however, when it came time for Forum, Diamond's request of the audience was not to flat-out find a wall created by a character and get rid of it, but rather to go looking for "the small moments, in which we create the bricks with which we build the walls inside ourselves and in between each other" (Diamond, Final Report 90). Rather than looking for large, global solutions, this made the task much more manageable and relatable: What small choices do we make during our day that add another brick to the walls inside us? Another way of approaching it, Diamond suggested, was as building a bridge. Rather than *not* creating another brick, what small choice could the characters make *to* create a bridge, inside themselves or with another character? These were the frozen moments explored at length in *Us and Them (the Inquiry)*, the tiny segments of the final scene of *Us and Them (the Play)* that served as entry points to earlier scenes. At one point in the first half of the play, Amina called Ligaya, in search of a friend, and Amina didn't answer. What if she did? What would happen if Tanner's father, upon being told (in a flashback scene) that Tanner identified as male, had been ever so slightly more inclined to accept this reality? Throughout the Forum, Diamond made sure at all times to trace the consequences of these slight shifts in behavior as to how they would have affected each character's experience through the rest of the play, and beyond. The suggestion that *Us and Them (the Play)* leaves one with is that these minute changes are a) quite possible, if we pay attention, and b) the only thing that can prevent our society from existing in a constant state of riot.

Beyond the omnipresent existence of walls and potential bridges throughout the play, the other through-line that could not be ignored was the riot itself. The lights came up on the first scene with Ligaya adding her contribution to the Wall of Healing: "Was this really about hockey?" The question served as a conversation-starter for her and Amina, but it also got the audience to think about why exactly our community erupted in violence. The event permeated the entire play, from the opening projections to the threat of more violence that closed the final scene. The scene changes were often enacted as mini-riots, with cast members stomping on furniture as they arranged it for the next scene. Often, inner turmoil manifested itself in stage imagery equivalent to a personal riot. The riot as metaphor even extended to natural disasters—Ligaya received news of a storm causing flooding that affected her family in the Philippines. Her inability to do anything about it resulted in a heart-wrenching scene of her inner experience of a natural world in pure and overwhelming revolt. The actual hockey

riot served as a springboard for investigating all manner of personal, natural, and societal riot, both real and metaphorical. As Diamond explains in his Final Report on the play, "The riot (we hope) threads through everything as an energy … *the riot was never about hockey—it was and is about the alienation that occurs as we build walls between other people and us, and inside ourselves, that turn "us" into "us and them"* (72). It was a powerful metaphor, and was extremely relevant in the months immediately following the event itself. The combination of framing the play around the riot, and its resulting Wall of Healing, was an inspired way to take actual imagery and move it into the symbolic space of the theatre.

*Us and Them (the Play)* was a triumph of theatrical form following content. Headlines' stated intent to explore the personal and cultural walls that separate us from others was echoed physically in the set and metaphorically in the Forum structure, which forced the "fourth wall" to be gradually torn down as the event progressed. The decision to highlight the "butterfly effect"—that large results can come from miniscule actions—was exemplified by the innovative time travel format of the Forum. And the view of riot-as-metaphor—that "we ARE the riot" (Diamond, Final Report 77)—was manifested in the countless riots on display, real and imagined, throughout the night.

This production coincided with the thirtieth anniversary of Headlines' existence as a theatre company—a fitting time to be looking at the fundamental, deeper issues that have affected and informed much of their previous work. As Diamond said at the end of every *Inquiry* and *Play* event, Headlines views its work as a circle: it begins in *reality* (the actual riot; Vancouver/Canadian culture), becomes an *image* of reality (the play), and evolves into a *transformed image* of reality (the Forum). That circle is only fully complete, he continued, when we the audience take that transformed image and bring it back to reality. Overall, the production had an estimated audience of 22,471 people, including a live webcast and two subsequent telecasts (Diamond, Final Report 7). If every one of those people followed through on this suggestion and made one small decision differently based on their experience at *Us and Them (the Play)*, who knows what future riots—internal and external—we could prevent.

## NOTE

1 Thereby fulfilling the duty of what Boal called spect-actors: for Boal, someone who can do nothing but watch is ultimately powerless—"a spectator is always less than a man!" he wrote (147).

2 The next two phases are *epoché* and *emergence*. For a deeper look at how Headlines engages with this praxis, see my article in volume 9.1 of this magazine, or, of course, Diamond's book.

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# NEVER STOP ACTING UP—THE POWER OF ONE'S VOICE

BY JESSICA ABDALLAH

Amiri Baraka, Pat Darbasie and George Boyd

The presence of the African voice in Western theatre has long been marginalized and undervalued. On May 27-28, 2011, Black Theatre Workshop (BTW) presented Since Mama Done Got Off the Couch!—a conference whose aim was to give light to the works of African communities. In doing so, the conference brought together Canadian, Caribbean, and American artists to explore the significance of African theatre contributions and the common roots of the African voice, and to delve into the discovery of a distinctive African Canadian voice. The panel of esteemed playwrights included Amiri Baraka, George Boyd, Pat Darbasie, David Edgecombe, ahdri zhina mandiela, and Djanet Sears, with playwright George Elliott Clarke as the mediator for the panel discussion.

Since Mama Done Got Off the Couch! took place at Concordia University, which partnered this endeavour. The first day consisted of an interactive panel discussion followed by a reception, where participants had the opportunity to network and discuss the day's topics in an informal setting. On the second day, writers' seminars for emerging playwrights were followed by a private lecture by Amiri Baraka. These offered the possibility of more intimate sessions with our esteemed panellists while keeping with BTW's goal of forging a new generation of Black Canadian playwrights to continue with the telling of African stories.

The panel discussion in particular gave the Montreal community a new awareness of the works of African writers and the struggles they have faced in presenting their stories. The community witnessed not only the rich dialogue among the diverse panellists of playwrights, but also their reading of excerpts from some of their most influential plays. These included George Boyd's *Wade in the Water*, the language-rich story of a slave who finds freedom; *Harlem Duet* by Djanet Sears, a work that changed the discourse of African Canadian theatre with its unapologetic look at the effects a white-dominated culture can have on the African American consciousness; and the new poetic musicality of dub theatre found in ahdri zhina mandiela's *who knew grannie: a dub aria*.

The following transcriptions attempt to capture fragments of the fascinating dialogue that emerged during the conference's panel discussion. Although the topics that were covered varied wildly, one common thread ran through the conversations—that of the importance of the African voice. This transcription follows the structure of the panel discussion and the questions posed, journeying through the evolution of the African voice: from the discovery of one's own voice, to exploring the power of one's voice in fostering new voices.

Since Mama Done Got Off the Couch! brought together upwards of one hundred people from all backgrounds to engage in a dialogue and to build awareness. Building awareness builds understanding, understanding builds capacity, capacity builds an audience, and the audience is the community.

### "WHAT WAS YOUR CHIEF MOTIVATION IN BECOMING A WRITER?"

*Pat Darbasie*:
"I am an actor chiefly and it is, and continues to be, my first love. But I live in Edmonton, which is a wonderful theatre community. [...] But as you age in this business you find yourself diversifying. You also find that—again if you stay with it long enough—you become an elder, in some ways, and that there are stories that need to be told and sometimes you're the only person who can tell those stories. 'Cause there is a rich history of Black folks in Edmonton and around that region, and that's what motivated me to start writing. And as George [Boyd] here says, there is something to sharing that history and seeing it come to life on stage. I mean there are many ways to tell those stories but since theatre is the way that I story-tell, it just seemed to be a natural progression to go from actor to playwright, although it is still hard for me. It's still a challenge to write."

*ahdri zhina mandiela:*
"I write without knowing it because I got turned onto language at the age of thirteen [...] in Jamaica and to the power of a performance, not necessarily the written word, of Claude S. MacKay—a poem called "If We Must Die." That held me until my late teens, when I started writing in and out of my sleep. Writing from dreams. Transcribing in my physics lectures at York University without knowing why. And the power of languages is what has held me to writing, to working, as a theatre artist. I often don't call myself a playwright because what I do, what I believe I do, is wield the power of language in communicating ideas. For me, it is often less about story and less about telling story, but more than anything about formulating communication passages. So I tend to concentrate on style and form—hence the generation of dub theatre over the years."

*Amiri Baraka:*
"I'm essentially a poet, and what that means is what you experience of the world itself you try to describe to yourself and at the same time to other people. What the world is? What it feels like? What it makes you think of? You know, why is it like that? And I've been like that since I was a little boy. I wrote a newspaper when I was about ten and I only had ten copies because I had to write them all out by hand. [...] And then I finally found out about poetry a long time later, that actually you're supposed to tell about the world. You're not supposed to make up stuff, you're not supposed to pretend to be somewhere else, think you talk another language . . . you're supposed to say what it is, day to day, moment to moment. I found that out. And so that's why I wanted to do that, because I could do that easily—what's happening today, what I see, what I feel, what I want. So that's essentially feeling."

*Djanet Sears*:
"I started an actor by nature. I am a writer by nurture. I finished my actor training and began auditioning, and I was auditioning for the role of the servant, I was auditioning for the role of the slave, and the runaway slave, and the drug addict's girlfriend, and the prostitute—and I thought, 'Hmm. Are there no others stories about me?' And my complaining is what led me to writing. [...] When I look—and I am distanced enough to see it—my writing follows a kind of arch like the slave narrative in the sense that my first play is about me, indirectly. […] I call it an autobiomythography—I've stolen that title from bell hooks and audre lorde. But it's a story of my trip to Africa mythologized. Fictionalized. And after telling my own story, there were stories about people in my community. And so my approach to writing and story has evolved. But that's why I started writing. And I began to like writing more than I liked acting, and that was a wonderful transformation inside of me."

### "MUST A BLACK PLAYWRIGHT ALWAYS WRITE ABOUT BLACKNESS?"

*George Boyd*:
"The freedom of being an artist allows us to tackle any subject matter, and our characters don't necessarily have to be people of colour. I think, though, we're vulnerable—as we're susceptible to writing anything that comes our way from anything we read, anything we write, from any inspiration."

*ahdri zhina mandiela*:
"I think anything that we write as Black folks that has anything to do with our ideas about the world or who we are invariably is gonna involve writing about other Black peoples, whether

Djanet Sears; Amiri Barak; and Tyrone Benskin, past AD of BTW and currently MP for the riding of Jeanne-Le Ber

*And I remember someone talking about one of my plays, which is set in New York, saying, 'Well, that's not really a Canadian play. Why couldn't it be set in Canada?' And I'm thinking, no one calls Shakespeare an Italian playwright.*

they are people known from history or just people known from our own personal stories. I truly believe that we need not be confined to writing specifically on historical ideas, but certainly just because of who we are and the kind of world we live in, our stories are going to touch on these places. So it's not from a prescribed place and I don't think we need to work from there at all."

*Djanet Sears*:
"That reminds me of a question sometimes asked in Canadian theatre and that is, 'Do Canadian plays need to be set in Canada?' And I remember someone talking about one of my plays, which is set in New York, saying, 'Well, that's not really a Canadian play. Why couldn't it be set in Canada?' And I'm thinking, no one calls Shakespeare an Italian playwright. He has so many plays set in Italy, but no one does. So I think that those limitations come from outside. Come from elsewhere. In terms of your own work, your own limitations should be the breadth of your imagination."

*Amiri Baraka*:
"If you write about your life—you *should* write about your life—and for Black people their life is about being Black one way or the other. [...] If you write about your life, that's the most authentic thing you can do, you know what I mean? The problem is most people *object* to your life. The problem about Black plays, mainly, is what you writing about. It's the content. The content. [...] For instance, if somebody writes 'Since Mama done got off the couch'—my momma never been on the couch. Is she being psycho-analyzed? Or, is it a sexual thing? Or is she just resting? But, I mean, that's George Wolfe, that's from somebody who can be quoted because the content of what he writes is acceptable to people that run the society. It's as simple as that. *What* you're talking about makes you an anathema. Nothing else."

*George Elliott Clarke*:
"The question of content has just been pointed out—it's absolutely crucial—and the point of imagination is absolutely crucial. And, if you really stop to think about it, there is no reason why our content cannot explore all the furthest reaches of our imagination—whatever that may be. Although it may be a question as to whether it will be produced. But I do want to suggest that we sometimes do not give our imaginations enough freedom, even though imaginations exercise with great liberty all around all the time."

**"IS THERE A SPECIFIC AFRICAN CANADIAN, OR AFRICAN AMERICAN, AESTHETIC THAT MAKES OUR WORKS DIFFERENT FROM EUROPEAN PRACTICES?"**

*Djanet Sears*:
"When do we know if there is? What if I write a play that doesn't have any of those characteristics? Does my play become—'This is NOT an African Canadian play!' 'Cause, I agree that I can find a lot of African diasporic characteristics in my work but then again I don't know the breadth of what that experience is. I don't know how much the West has influenced that. My family has been here for many, many generations so I sometimes worry—even in my very Afro-centric days—about anything that says THIS is what African Canadian is. THIS is what African Canadian theatre is. THIS is what Black theatre IS. Because then there are rules and I take off again . . . So, there's a lot of resistance there inside of me."

*Amiri Baraka*:
"The thing about African, and then African diaspora style and method, is that we've been here for so many years that you have to look at what the milk looks like. You understand? You say, 'Is milk,' but why is it that colour? You know, you listen to American music—American music is African music played by White people. You understand? So, the question is, your culture has been absorbed. The reason that you exist still is that you're able to influence everything. I mean, people playing the blues, people playing this, people playing that, people dancing, and so forth. At the bottom of that—that refuses to sink—is the African. [...] And at the bottom of the bottom is African women. You cannot escape that fact. [...] The culture has absorbed all these things so you can claim anything—salsa, the blues, country and western—it's all yours."

*ahdri zhina mandiela*:
"I think that for me, if we talk of essential aesthetic, it is the rhythm of our lives and how that gets played out in the stories and the style and the form. It's the rhythm of our lives that's essential and always there. Whether it's in language and whether it's an inclusion of language styles or music styles, there's always that underlining rhythm that defines and that's always represented."

*David Edgecombe*:
"I have learnt to steer clear of questions like this because you can really waste a lot of energy dealing with it. I'll tell you what I celebrate. I celebrate the fact that African people all over the world understand that they must act up. And they understand what Alice Walker put in this wonderful line—'It is better to be unseen than unheard.'"

**CLARENCE BAYNE, FOUNDING MEMBER OF BTW, ON THE CONFERENCE'S TITLE:**

"There are many queries and shades of meaning in this title. To me it depends on your culture, on your race—that is, how you see it, your class, country, location, your location within that country, your philosophy of life, your gender, back and forth. Now, what we are talking about in this conference is about Black people, so I think it's fair to say that Black mamas don't sit on no couch doing nothing. So, why did she get off the couch? Does that mean it's sleep time? Well, we all need to take into consideration that this is not America, because I have lived in the Caribbean and I have visited and have many African friends and we do not use the term 'couch.' We have settees, sofas, chesterfields, benches and folding chairs. [...] In our culture, in Africa and the Caribbean, sitting on these types of furniture does not imply laziness or lack of ambition, but the bed, in particular, has direct reference to a laziness, because my mother would say to me, 'Boy, you know what time it is? Why you won't get up the bed and find something to do? You just hanging around the house doing nothing. Get up! Get up! You too lazy.' So, ladies and gentlemen, please explain to us how you see the couch in relationship to mama and mama in relationship to the couch. Is the couch the seat of authority and mama the central force? Or, is it just a place for mama to sit that was conveniently placed there by the stage manager? What meaning does it carry in the phrase "Since Mama done got off the couch?" Does it define a class of plays? How has it been used in similar plays other than

*A Raisin in the Sun* and Mr. Wolfe's *The Colored Museum*? Are we making only a reference to the couch as a metaphor for inaction? Or waiting for divine intervention? And does mama's 'getting off' indicate the community in action, people taking responsibility and deciding to act?

### "HOW DO YOU AS PLAYWRIGHTS, NOVELISTS, ESSAYISTS, AND POETS SIGNAL THAT MAMA IS ON THE MOVE? IF INDEED SHE IS."

*Patricia Darbasie*:
"To go to something [Clarence Bayne] said about West Indian mothers—of which mine was—that you weren't allowed to sit on the couch. That, 'You better be doing something!' You know. So, for me, that reference was the thing that was said to me when I was very young. That if you were going to do something you better do it twice as good as somebody else if you were going to get ahead, because that's what it meant to be Black. And that was the standard. So that reference to getting off the couch is not only that you need to get up, but you need to do it and do it exceedingly well. And I think, in some ways, for a play to get produced by someone 'outside the norm' in terms of our writing, it better be damn good. So to me that's the reference, that's what I internalized from the title."

*Djanet Sears*:
"I think that when you look at *A Raisin in the Sun*, Mama sits down once. Sits down once. So I don't know through whose eyes it's being seen."

*Amiri Baraka*:
"Why are we left with that? That's what you will be left with unless you do your own. You will be left with your mama sitting on the couch, like the welfare mamas. You understand? You will get that image of yourself, like W.E.B. Dubois said about the Devil consciousness, 'They will teach you to see yourself through the eyes of people who hate you.' You know what I mean? Get off the couch?!? My mama had a gig all her life—that I knew of—and then she had to come home and mess with us."

*David Edgecombe*:
"My primal superstition is that there is a magic to starting. While I did notice the bogus nature of the quote, I really take it to be a metaphor for beginning. [...] And we do know that often times in progressive movements, both on the Black and White sides of the sphere, a lot of the important things happen when mama starts. So that was the way I took it to mean. It's the beginning of something, and certainly I feel that whether it is mama or the playwrights or the actors or the directors or the entrepreneurs, that somebody damn well better start. We better start making sure we have our own locations. That we have our own money so that plays can be put on. That we take advantage of all of the technology and that we recognize that it is going to happen when somebody gets up off the couch."

*George Elliott Clarke*:
"Maybe it's a question of metaphor and maybe it should be "Since Mama Done Set Fire to the Couch." I think something we can take away from this discussion is that we don't have to be frozen in these metaphors."

### "HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT OUR STORIES BEING TOLD BY OTHER PEOPLE?"

*ahdri zhina mandiela*:
"The playwright's voice is always embedded in the work and that's really important—to be truthful. What makes a really great play is the truthfulness of that playwright's voice within."

### "WHAT DO YOU FEEL THAT PLAYWRIGHTS NOW NEED TO KNOW IN ORDER FOR ALL OF US TO MOVE FORWARD?"

*George Elliott Clarke*:
"One word—history. It's not just the younger generations, but all of us need to know our history. Collectively, as peoples, as Canadians, as Black people, as people of mixed race heritage, and in terms of economics, in terms of class, etcetera, etcetera. The greatest weapon—I'm going to use that word deliberately—that the elites have, that the ruling class has, that the owners of theatres have or owners of production companies have is that they know the history. And we don't. [...] It's all about exclusion and all about holding onto their dominance. We often forget that it's always a struggle. It is always a struggle. We can't say that the Civil Rights Movement ended anything. We can't say that the election of Barack Obama becoming the president of the United States ended anything. The struggle goes on and we're always confused. We get confused by thinking, 'Oh yes, we have equality now.' No we don't. We don't have equality now. We don't have equality for women—yet. We don't have equality for people of colour, visual minorities—yet. We don't have equality for Aboriginal people in this country—yet. All the struggles are still there but we're always told, 'Oh, don't worry things are better now. Things are better now. Things are getting better now.' If things are getting better it's because somebody fought to make them better, and if you don't continue fighting you will lose the progress that has already been made. [...] Even the right to vote. We just had a federal election, just a little while ago, in this country, and what we often forget is the struggle it took, because a lot of powerful people didn't want poor people, working class people, Black people, Native people in this country [...] to be allowed to vote. They were afraid that people would use the vote to overthrow them. Which is exactly what we should be doing, right? But we don't know our history. We—collectively—do not know our history of struggle. For me, that is what we constantly need to do in order to move ourselves forward, and to write the kind of stories that will animate people and, at the same time, teach them without being pedantic, but so that we know and own our history. And, if we know it, we're going to be less likely to be bamboozled or less likely to be fooled or less likely to be tricked. If we know our history we can then speak back to those who want to try to fool us again."

*Conversations transcribed and edited by Jessica Abdallah.*

ahdri zhina mandiela, David Edgecombe, George Elliott Clarke and Clarence Bayne

*So that reference to getting off the couch is not only that you need to get up, but you need to do it and do it exceedingly well. And I think, in some ways, for a play to get produced by someone 'outside the norm' in terms of our writing, it better be damn good.*

## PANELISTS

**AMIRI BARAKA** has produced over 40 books of plays, essays, poems, and music history and is an esteemed lecturer, publishing his first volume of poetry, *Preface to a Twenty-Volume Suicide Note*, in 1961. He was later established as a playwright with the Obie-winning production of *Dutchman* in New York (1964). He has received many awards, including the American Academy of Arts and Letters award, and the James Weldon Johnson Medal for contributions to the arts.

**DR. CLARENCE BAYNE** moved from the West Indies to study at the University of British Columbia, where he obtained a BA (1958) and MEcon (1960). He completed his PhD at McGill (1977) and now currently teaches at Concordia University (JMSB). Dr. Bayne has made many contributions to the Black community in Quebec, especially in the arts and his development work. He is best known as being one of the founding members of the Black Theatre Workshop.

**GEORGE BOYD** is an award winning playwright and former co-host of the CBC "Morning News." His professional career began in 1988 with the production of *Shine Boy* at the Neptune Theatre in Halifax. In 1999, Boyd was nominated for a Governor General's Literary Award for his play *Consecrated Ground*. Other works include *Wade in the Water* and *Gideon's Blues*. He currently resides in Montreal and is at work on a new play tentatively titled *In the Wildwood*.

**GEORGE ELLIOTT CLARKE**, a poet, writer, and scholar, is currently the inaugural E. J. Pratt Professor of Canadian Literature at the University of Toronto. His many honours include the Governor General's Award for Poetry (2001), appointment to the Order of Canada at the rank of Officer (2008), and seven honorary doctorates. His major titles include his poetry *Execution Poems* (2000); the verse-tragedy *Beatrice Chancy* (1999); the opera libretti *Quebecite* (2003); and the novel, *George & Rue* (2004).

**PATRICIA DARBASIE** is an award-winning actor and playwright from Edmonton. In 2001 she wrote her first play, *Carnival Magic*, based on West Indian culture. Her play, *Ribbon*, is a one-woman show that she wrote and has performed across Western Canada. Pat's latest works include *When Stone Meets Water* (Sprout's Festival 2010) and *A West Indian Diary*, based on interviews with the Caribbean community. Pat teaches at the University of Alberta and Concordia University College of Alberta.

**DAVID EDGECOMBE** has a mission to support artistic endeavours in the Virgin Islands. In Canada, he served as resident artist for Black Theatre Workshop and was commissioned to write the play *Strong Currents* as Canada's contribution to the second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC). Upon returning to the Islands, Edgecombe began teaching at the University of the Virgin Islands. 1992, he became director of the Reichhold Center for the Arts.

**AHDRI ZHINA MANDIELA**, founder and artistic director of the Toronto-based b current Performing Arts, is best known as a director and poet/performer. She has supported numerous artists and is the driving force behind the rock. paper.sistahz festival. mandiela has performed, lectured, and directed in several countries. Independent works include dance choreographies, cd recordings, videos, and the independent film, *on/black/stage/women*. Her most recent creation, *who knew grannie/a dub aria*, was produced by Obsidian Theatre in association with Factory Theatre.

**DJANET SEARS** is the recipient of the 1998 Governor General's Literary Award, and her play *Harlem Duet* has won multiple Dora Awards. She is the motivating force behind the AfriCanadian Playwrights' Festival and a founding member of the Obsidian Theatre Company. Sears is also the editor of *Testifyin':* Volumes I & II, the first anthologies of plays by playwrights of African descent in Canada. She is currently an adjunct professor at University College, University of Toronto.

# REPORT FROM IRELAND: *Cultural diversity on the stage?*

BY NATALIE HARROWER

If you've been reading the news about Ireland over the last five years, then you know that things keep getting worse—at least from an economic standpoint. Since the massive growth spurt known as the "Celtic Tiger" petered out in 2001, the Irish economy made a declining series of roars until it reached near collapse. In a perverse reversal of fortune, Ireland went from having one of the highest per capita GDPs in Europe in the mid-2000s to accepting a massive financial bailout from the International Monetary Fund near the end of 2010. Alongside the debt crisis, unemployment tripled, net emigration surpassed levels not seen since before the Celtic Tiger, and the government started heavily cutting public sector salaries, pensions, and social welfare (Eurostat, CSO).

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The Ireland leading up to the bust, from the early years of the boom in the mid-1990s to the global economic meltdown in 2008, was marked by a number of massive social changes. Significant social and demographic shifts reframed a once ethnographically homogeneous Catholic state into a secular, increasingly multicultural country favoured by international corporations, tourists, migrants, and asylum-seekers. Dublin was suddenly inhabited by substantial numbers of people from across Europe, Africa, and Asia. Interestingly, a sizeable percentage of the population drain that accompanied the economic downturn in 2008 was made up of Irish nationals, with emigration doubling in this group between 2010 and 2011 (CSO). Those who had moved to Ireland from other countries, on the other hand, tended to stay put, which meant that the trend towards a more ethnically and culturally diverse landscape continued.

While major economic and demographic shifts are recent phenomena for Ireland, the story of Ireland's rich literary and theatrical culture goes much farther back: Christopher Morash's excellent history of Irish theatre, for example, traces four hundred years of theatrical activity in Ireland. But the modern theatre in Ireland was intentionally born out of a desire to represent Ireland as an independent cultural entity—distinct from the British colonizers. Considering the recent changes in Ireland's demography, it is interesting to assess the extent to which Irish theatre continues to reflect the faces and experiences of contemporary Ireland.

When discussing theatre, and indeed any artistic representation of Ireland, it is impossible to ignore the programming at the Abbey Theatre, Ireland's main, centrally funded national theatre. Constituted to foster Irish playwriting and to promote an indigenous theatrical culture to and for the then-inchoate Irish nation, the Abbey was founded in 1903 by Lady Augusta Gregory and William Butler Yeats out of the earlier Irish Literary Theatre. In the early days of its founding, the Abbey was essential to the formation of a distinct Irish national consciousness. As part of the Irish literary revival of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which turned to Celtic legends and folklore as a way to bolster modern Irish cultural identity, the Abbey Theatre produced plays by Yeats and Gregory aimed at cultivating a distinct Irish national pride. In the 1920s and 1930s, after the birth of the Irish Free State, Sean O'Casey's Dublin Trilogy focused a sharp lens on working-class tenement life and the political turmoil of revolutionary Ireland.

Over a century after its founding, and following the establishment of the Irish Republic and the end of armed conflict in Northern Ireland, the Abbey theatre still retains a focus on the political and social issues of Irish nationalism. In the years leading up to the Celtic Tiger period, and at the same time that the demographics of Ireland were fomenting and congealing, the Abbey programmed a number of introspective new Irish plays exploring the shibboleths of Irish history and national identity. For example, the gentle and poetic "family plays" of Sebastian Barry, including *Prayers of Sherkin* (1990), can be seen as offering much-needed revisionist history, challenging the binaries of Catholic/nationalist vs. Protestant/loyalist that were long offered as the only real options for categorizing Irish identity.

Plays by Abbey favourite Marina Carr, on the other hand, alluded to ancient Greek myths in ways that may have shocked the theatre's early revivalist audiences for their irreverence, profanity, and dark bodily humour. Characters in Carr's plays, including *The Mai* (1994), *Portia Coughlan* (1996), and *By the Bog of Cats…* (1998), are preoccupied with ethnicity, bloodlines, memory, heredity—all the mythical and corporeal ghosts of the past. Her characters, a rough collection from the centre of the country known as the midlands, are hardly affable folk, drawn to violence, acerbic dialogue, and inbreeding.

But in their roughness, Carr offers a kind of honesty and diversity that cut through the more easily digestible fare often featured on Abbey stages. For one, her plays can be seen to create a space for Irish Travellers[1] on the contemporary national stage, although whether or not this marks a positive move towards staging diversity is debatable: *all* of her characters, Travellers included, are rather unpleasant, and taken as representative of Irishness, would leave one despairing for the entire country.

© Hugh O'Conor
Actors: Bridget Collins, Bridget Dinnigan, Catherine Kerrigan, Imelda Collins, Winnie Collins, Annmarie McDonnell and Louise Connors

*In a country where the meanings of "Irish society," "citizens," and "across Ireland" have been rapidly changing, one needs to assess exactly which "cultural context" the theatre is addressing.*

Still, these plays, along with many other new Irish plays, focus a critical lens on the constitution of Irish identity. The difference today, in terms of representing diversity, is that the social and cultural face of Ireland has changed significantly in the last twenty years, and, increasingly, these relatively new changes are not equally played out on the floorboards of the national stage.

A survey of the Abbey's seasons from 2007 to the present shows several trends. During this time, approximately two-thirds to three-quarters of the programming has been taken up by a mix of Shakespeare, Restoration comedies, or modern classics from America, Europe, Britain, and Ireland. Even Marina Carr's latest play, *16 Possible Glimpses*, which premiered at the Abbey as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival in October 2011, is about Chekhov. The penchant for staging old standards has not gone unnoticed, with reviewer Tanya Dean remarking that the Abbey's indulgence in Restoration comedy—"sumptuous, coiffed and rouged confections"—demonstrates a "brave disregard for a global financial downturn."

While it is hard to begrudge a state-funded institution for programming "audience-pleasers" in difficult economic times, it is important to note that the Abbey continues to draw the largest annual operating grant from the Arts Council and that its mandate remains consistent (Arts Council). In the Abbey's own words, their mission is to "reflect and engage with Irish society" and to "attract new audiences, increase participation and to empower citizens to understand and contribute to the political, social and cultural context of Ireland in

the 21st century." As the first state-funded theatre in the English-speaking world, the Abbey sees its role as that of conducting a "national conversation across Ireland" (Abbey Theatre). In a country where the meanings of "Irish society," "citizens," and "across Ireland" have been rapidly changing, one needs to assess exactly which "cultural context" the theatre is addressing.

The Abbey clearly retains a commitment to new Irish writing, with each recent season featuring an average of three or four new Irish plays. Some of these plays have addressed Ireland's growing multiculturalism; in 2007, the Abbey staged a bold new adaptation of J. M. Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*, a play that represents modern theatrical Ireland on university drama syllabi across the English-speaking world. This adaptation, by Bisi Adigun and Roddy Doyle, transforms the central character of Christy Mahon into Christopher Malomo, a Nigerian asylum-seeker, and shifts the setting from rural County Mayo in the early 1900s to present-day Dublin, tapping into issues of immigration, dislocation, and, one would think, race. However, reviews in major papers found the translation heavy-handed, with the *Variety* reviewer concluding that the production actually erased Christopher's racial difference, pulling the play's potential punch (Fricker).

Aside from *Playboy*, the Irish plays given full production on the Abbey's stages represent an older picture of Ireland: one that lacks cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity, even as the streets surrounding the theatre bustle with new immigrants. What the Abbey's new Irish plays over the last five years do reveal is a bipartite effort to engage with difficult social issues, even if these issues are not particularly new. On the one hand, there have been several plays that centre around dysfunctional family relationships, regret, loneliness, disenfranchisement, and struggles with religion. Marina Carr's *Woman and Scarecrow*; Enda Walsh's *The New Electric Ballroom* and Tolstoy adaptation, *Delirium*; Sebastian Barry's *Tales of Ballycumber*; and Paul Mercier's *The Passing* and *The East Pier* all fit into this category. These plays, like so many Irish plays that came before them, are steeped in memory and the past. On the other hand, the Abbey has recently been commissioning and staging plays that deal with more recent revelations of systemic abuse by state- and Church-run institutions in Ireland. The release of the Ryan and Murphy reports in 2009 confirmed not only that thousands of children had been sexually abused in these institutions from the 1930s onward, but that the Catholic Church and Garda (Ireland's police force) had known about the abuses and at times had actively covered them up and allowed them to continue.[2]

The Abbey addressed these issues directly in their 2010 season through a series titled *The Darkest Corner*, which included a staged reading of Richard Johnson's *The Evidence I Shall Give*—a play that was already questioning the state's role in the treatment of children when it premiered in 1961. They also mounted *Christ Deliver Us!* by veteran Abbey playwright Thomas Kilroy, which adapts Wedekind's *Spring Awakening* to a Diocesan secondary school in the late 1940s; commissioned the documentary-style *No Escape* by Mary Raftery; and produced *James X* by Mannix Flynn, which was first performed in 2003 at the Project Arts Centre. Theatre scholar Emilie Pine characterized these latter two plays as not only "powerful theatrically" but "morally essential," noting that the Abbey's choice of programming was "a much-needed and brave first step in a self-consciously "national" artistic response." The series clearly tapped into issues deeply relevant to Irish identity at the current moment; yet, ironically, the plays still address a particular configuration of Irish history—that is, when the Catholic Church held unquestioned and unrivalled moral suasion and Ireland was relatively sheltered from outside cultural influences.

Beyond the Abbey, the best place to assess the theatrical scope of diversity on Dublin's stages is the Project Arts Centre, an artist-centred, multi-art-form hub that is "interested in all performing arts that embrace a contemporary sensibility," but not specifically mandated, at least in terms of its website mission statement, to engage with contemporary social and political issues. In the Dublin theatre scene, the Project is the "edgy" space for theatrical exploration, or for international shows that may be deemed too "fringe" for the city's larger houses. (It is fair to focus on Dublin, because almost every play of note mounted in the Republic originates in Dublin or is remounted in the capital city; this configuration is notably different from the often disconnected theatre cultures in Canada's different regions).

*Aside from Playboy, the Irish plays given full production on the Abbey's stages represent an older picture of Ireland: one that lacks cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity, even as the streets surrounding the theatre bustle with new immigrants.*

In June 2010, *The Trailer of Bridget Dinnigan* at the Project featured a cast from the Irish Traveller community in a very localized adaptation of Federico Garcia Lorca's *The House of Bernarda Alba*. The director, Dylan Tighe, developed the show with the Blanchardstown Traveller Development Group and the Irish Traveller Movement—both political advocacy groups for Traveller's rights and welfare. What was remarkable about the show was not only that it featured non-professional actors speaking in Cant (the Traveller language), but also that it brought Traveller audiences to the Project in droves, infusing the space with a completely different audience-performer dialectic. From the pre-show to the curtain call, audience members responded vocally to the action on stage, and the performers, who delivered their lines without punctuation, had to fight against breaking character on stage and laughing at their own lines. The result was a visceral metatheatrical event that celebrated the relationship between performer and spectator while also illuminating "tensions surrounding social mores, tradition, gender conventions" in Traveller culture (Walsh).

The Project Arts Centre is also at the forefront of staging queerness, both in terms of complicating gender binaries and of exploring non-heteronormative sexualities. In fact, the representation of sexual diversity on Irish stages is one area of theatrical culture that has expanded remarkably in the last five years, perhaps because of contemporaneous changes in legal and social attitudes towards homosexuality. Dublin's first international gay theatre festival was inaugurated in 2004, and the first anthology of queer Irish plays, *Queer Notions,* edited by Fintan Walsh, was published in 2010. These dates may seem unusually recent until one considers that homosexuality was decriminalized in the Republic of Ireland in 1993, and anti-discrimination laws on the basis of sexual orientation appeared in 1998 and 2004. Walsh's collection draws work from the first decade of the current century, demonstrating that explorations of queer culture on stage in Ireland have reached a certain critical mass. Notably, the Dublin Fringe Festival, which is quickly becoming a major event on the Irish theatrical calendar, included "gay interest" as a searchable performance category in its 2010 and 2011 festival programs.

A group that can be credited with providing a consistent and challenging output of queer theatre in Ireland is THISISPOPBABY, a young company led by energetic duo Jenny Jennings and Phillip McMahon. Working in close connection with the Project Arts Centre, THISISPOPBABY curated the first queer arts program (also titled *Queer Notions*) as part of Dublin's official Pride celebrations in 2009, and then produced the mini-festival again at the Project in 2010. The company has also curated five iterations of WERK, a "performance art cabaret," at the Abbey theatre and programmed a performance art installation for the popular outdoor music festival, Electric Picnic, from 2008-2010. However, in the (barely) five years that the company has been making queer theatre in Dublin, their most recognized collaborations have been with Ireland's most public drag queen, Panti.

Panti, and her daytime off-stage alter-ego Rory O'Neill, is a well-loved icon of gay culture in Dublin and has steadily built a small empire of queerness about town. She owns the eponymous Pantibar, a popular gay bar with hotel suites above, and she is also the mistress of ceremonies at the Alternative Miss Ireland pageant—an annual raucous anti-pageant and HIV/AIDs fundraiser known as "gay Christmas" among its audience because it sparks an all-night party for queers across the city.[3] Panti also plays a political role—speaking at Pride celebrations and same-sex marriage rallies and admonishing those who sit on the sidelines of progressive action. (For example, see "No More Mr. Nice Gay," published on the LGBTNoise website).

In 2007, THISISPOPBABY directed and produced *In These Shoes?* at the tiny New Theatre, the first of three solo shows written and performed by Panti. The same show was part of the Dublin Gay Theatre Festival, and it was quickly followed by another solo show, *All Dolled Up*, down the street at the Project Arts Centre as part of the Dublin Fringe Festival. This theatre space has triple the capacity of the first venue, and the show sold out every night. But the real marker in terms of queer theatrical representation was their third collaboration, *A Woman in Progress*, which premiered at the Ulsterbank Dublin Theatre Festival—the principal theatre festival in Ireland and the oldest theatre festival of its kind in Europe. The festival

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draws large crowds internationally and from across Ireland, and the presence (and popularity) of Panti's show indicates that queerness was comfortably part of the theatrical mainstream.

Ironically, Panti's final message in the show is that young queers need to question the commercialization of gayness in Ireland and harness their "righteous anger" to fight for real equality. For the most part, the play is intensely personal, written as a series of letters from the adult Panti to her younger self Rory—a kind of portrait of the artist as young, gay, icon-in-waiting. While the narrative traverses a variety of topics, Panti's performance at the Ulsterbank festival shifted between vulnerability (her hands were visibly shaking in the scripted moments) to intoxicated confidence in the off-colour, ad-libbed sections. Panti is usually a very broad performer, not easily reined in by preset audio-visual cues, and the moments of nervousness made the performance all the more compelling; this was an intimate and real story about being gay in Ireland, told by a constructed, larger-than-life public persona.

Perhaps the explosion in gay theatre is the result of the discussion suddenly surrounding homosexuality in the Republic. After a fair amount of debate, the parliament passed a Civil Partnership Act in 2010, which for the first time allows same-sex couples to enter into civil unions. The rights afforded by the Act fall short of those granted to (opposite-sex) married couples, but many consider it a major leap in a short period of time. Perhaps the growing diversity of Ireland in general has allowed Irish politicians and Irish nationals to shine a critical light on long-held ideas of morality—ideas that have already been challenged by the series of scandals in the Catholic Church. The active presence of gays on Dublin's stages is a sign of growing cultural diversity, yet, as Panti may say herself, queerness may be assimilating to mainstream values in the process.

A recent production at the Abbey of the new play *No Romance* by Nancy Harris perhaps demonstrates this assimilation. The play is structured around three stories roughly linked by the trope of sexual secrets. The play explores conventionally taboo aspects of sexuality openly, but as reviewer Jesse Weaver argues, the potential for progressive provocation did not surface: "That issues of gay marriage or the intertwining of sexuality and illness barely register an uncomfortable shifting of seats in the Peacock audience . . . signals that these subjects have lost some of their subversive sting."

While perceived audience comfort does not equal the complete assimilation of once-marginalized identities, it does mark a shift in the kinds of discourse deemed acceptable on the national stage, and this is a notable change. Weaver concludes that the play does deliver "an effectually fractured portrait of an Ireland undergoing a collective loss of its sense of self." What requires further investigation on Irish stages, then, is how recent demographic shifts in the country have significantly reconfigured the very constitution of that "self."

## NOTES

1. Travellers are a distinct minority group indigenous to Ireland, who have a nomadic tradition. Itinerant Travellers typically live in caravans or roadside encampments throughout Ireland, although many Traveller families have chosen to "settle" in permanent housing. Ethnically distinct from Roma populations, they share a history of prejudice and poor treatment by "settled" or mainstream Irish society.
2. These reports were named for the commissions' respective chairpersons, Justice Sean Ryan and Justice Yvonne Murphy. The Ryan report investigates allegations of child abuse in state run institutions (schools, orphanages, hospitals) in the period 1936-2009. The Murphy Report investigates "the handling by Church and State authorities of allegations and suspicions of child abuse against clerics of the Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin" in the period 1975-2004.
3. The pageant, which for a long time was *the* major event on the queer social calendar, held its eighteenth and final show in March 2012. Panti stated that it was time for the founders to move on, but it is also likely that the show is no longer needed in the same way it once was; the Irish gay community has become much more visible since the pageant first raised its curtains.

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# *The Aesthetic of Violence through Dance and Theatre:* Looking at Aparna Sindhoor's *Encounter*

BY ALEXANDRA MARTIN

For its end-of-season show of 2011, Teesri Duniya Theatre presented Navarasa Dance Theater's (NDT) latest production, *Encounter*.[1] Currently based in Boston, NDT was founded in 1991 by dancer and choreographer Aparna Sindhoor in Mysore, India. NDT "has a wide repertoire of solo and group works in classical and contemporary dance and theatre. Inspired by Indian classical and folk dance forms, theatre, world music, martial art (kalarippayattu), aerial dance, yoga, live singing, and storytelling."[2] The company has performed widely around the world and is known for its works dealing with social and political issues, and *Encounter* represents its second major collaboration with Teesri Duniya Theatre. *Encounter*, by manifesting the identity of culturally diverse communities as an integral part of the place they live, responds to Teesri's mission of developing and promoting new art forms based on cultural experiences and diversity.

© Ganesh Ramachandran / Raghu Narayanan, Aparna Sindhoor, Anil Natyaveda

*Encounter* explores human interactions through territorial conflict. In a minimal and sober set, the performance stages a tribal rebellion against injustice and the brutal repression of armed forces. In this article, I address the paradoxical issue of representing violence, war, and armed conflict through aestheticized art forms. When representing abhorrent human rights violations, how can the stage use its transformative power to become truly effective? Is there a risk that art and artists might unintentionally denaturize the conflict and its ensuing tensions? This article raises questions not only about the poetics and politics of representation, but also about the ethics of portraying a story such as the one presented here.

*Encounter* is a stage adaptation of renowned Bengali writer Mahasweta Devi's short story *Draupadi*. Whereas Devi localizes the conflict in a specific region of India, tackling the issue of "notified" and "denotified tribes" of the country,[3] *Encounter* leaves the audience free to decide where the conflict could be happening.[4] The performance "explores imageries from history and the world, whether it is Native American history or indigenous people's history elsewhere or a modern day occurrence in Iraq or Afghanistan or Rwanda."[5]

Through the format of dance-theatre,[6] *Encounter* presents the story of an indigenous woman, Dopdi, battling against governmental repression in a setting of what appears to be an anti-colonial struggle. It is never explicitly stated that the story is based in India. However, because Sindhoor took inspiration from classical and contemporary Indian dances for her choreography and used several Indian languages in addition to English in her performance—and even simply because of the characters' names—the audience shares an implicit understanding that Dopdi is a South Asian woman. And of course knowing Devi's original story makes it easier to link the action with its geographical location. However, as Sindhoor points out, *Encounter* "could be anywhere in the world where indigenous people are denied their rights" (Pais A45). To make this point, she does not mention when and where the conflict occurred in the Montreal performance of *Encounter*.

According to a press release by Teesri Duniya Theatre (February 2011), *Encounter* tells the story of the "displacement of women by armed conflict who are frequently exposed to sexual violence, discrimination, and intimidation. It is a story of disappearance and savagery directed against peasant rebels who have refused to be silenced against all odds." Dopdi, (played by Sindhoor) is forcefully confined and raped, but she stands in front of her tormentor at the end, refusing to surrender, attempting to restore her dignity. The performance "depicts other characters either as witnesses or players in her struggle. Finally, Dopdi's story is a metaphor for many women who have survived and are surviving gendered violence."

The main themes of *Encounter* are drought, scarcity, racism, military coercive power, and insurgency. Embedded throughout the play are compelling dances, each imbued with symbolism evoking anger, pain, labour, etc. A sensuous duet by Sindhoor and Anil Natyaveda is performed in the form of an acrobatic solo, as they move up and down a ten-foot tall wooden column. Another dance represents a battle with the clash of wooden canes. However, the most emotionally charged sequence comes at the end of the piece and depicts Dopdi's rape by the militaries. This scene, while horrific in its content, is beautifully choreographed and strongly interpreted. It is this dance that leads me to explore the ethics and aesthetics of portraying violence through dance and theatre.

Staging war, when not done for the purposes of propaganda, is often intended to give voice to the voiceless—in order to reveal their experiences. This is the case with *Encounter*. The recent publication of *Performance in Place of War*, edited by Thomson, Hughes, and Balfour—a book that "engages with theatre and performance practices that come from places of war"—is enlightening for the study of this play. The book presents the readers with various "examples of performance that aim to build mutual understanding, provide relief, facilitate recovery and support justice, reconciliation and peace initiatives" (Thompson et al. 14).[7] By using the conceptual framework offered by Thomson et al., I suggest that Sindhoor's creation is a performance that does not properly set a performance in a place of war (in the geographical sense), but one that stages identities of resistance and questions the role of art and artists where violence is engaged.

First and foremost, *Encounter* is a *mise en abyme*, a play-within-a-play. It presents actors and dancers who are actors and dancers in their embodied characters. They are peasants and artists fighting for their land, for their rights, and for food. At night, they sing, dance, and narrate their story in front of the audience to make some money. Therefore, the implied theatrical agreement is that the audience is attending both performances: Sindhoor's *Encounter* and the one embedded in *Encounter*, which is therefore a performance worthy of being called "a performance in place *and time* of war."

© Ganesh Ramachandran / Full Cast: Aparna Sindhoor, Anil Natyaveda, Rajesh Raveendran, Raghu Narayanan, and Smitha Radhakrishnan

Indeed, a war play or performance must have an implied audience to be truly effective, because "theatre at its best transforms passive listeners into active witnesses" (Taft-Kaufman 32). *Encounter* imagines its live audience to be attending some artistic and creative acts of resistance and survival performed by the rebel peasants. Thus, *Encounter* virtually moves Calixa Lavallée's actual audience from the cultural centre to the epicenter of violence, whether it aims to be in India or elsewhere. The spectators, as a major part of the event, are brought into a frontline conflict where they explore the memory of colonial times. *Encounter* breaks with traditional theatrical realism based upon the fourth wall premise. This act of performance does not let members from the audience be free of mind. They will be compelled to look into the *other*'s reality.

The NDT has created many encounters in this one *Encounter*: dance intersects with theatre, poetry, and narrative; persecuted tribal people meet with the governmental armed force; native idioms are confronted with the colonizers'; and the audience encounters the performers with the fall of the fourth wall. Since the performance does not end with a resolution but with Dopdi's desperate cry for freedom, engaged spectators are also forced to think about the aftermath of violence. As Jill Taft-Kaufman points out about narrative theatre, "You can tell a true war story by the way it never seems to end. Not then, not ever" (37). *Encounter* provides no moment of closure, no easy solution that wraps up the conflict and permits the real and implied audiences to pretend that nothing had happened.

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It is for this reason, I posit, that *Encounter* escapes from the danger of pure aestheticization, where the prevalence of the form emancipates its subject—in this case violence—through art. According to Elaine Scarry, a concern with beauty is a concern with justice. Thus, beauty is not merely a "distraction, trivialization or betrayal of the painful" (cited in Thompson et al. 30). Contrary to what philosopher Theodor Adorno said, beauty does not "'remove something to the horror' but focuses attention on what is a fair and equitable response to a violent event" (Ibid.). *Encounter* breaks down the dichotomous framework of an aesthetic that opposes beauty to the useful/functional. Here, beauty has a purpose.

According to Thompson et al., this framework links the concept of beauty with ideas of the "sublime": a "power which is perilous, shattering, ravishing, traumatic, excessive, exhilarating, dwarfing, astonishing, uncontainable, overwhelming, boundless, obscure, terrifying, enthralling and uplifting" (Eagleton, cited in Thompson et al.). It is not surprising that the sublime "can be linked to the experience of war" (Thompson et al.) and can, by extension, be an analytical locus for an art form addressing the issues of war, genocide, mass violence, and overall human rights violations. The experience of the sublime, necessarily active in the performance in place of conflict, could be seen as a means of defeating terror.

However, we must be careful not to overestimate the transformative power of art in general, particularly in performance art. A suspicion toward the optimistic idea that an "aesthetically engaging representation of painful or traumatic experience (would automatically bring awareness and justice) remains prevalent" (Thompson et al. 29). Thompson et al. ask themselves if there are different kinds of styles and genres more effective than others in responding to the need of expressing and dissipating the terror of warfare (32).

Theatre, in its tireless desire to tell and question the word (Naugrette), has to position itself when it is time to reproduce the sense of chaos through a play depicting war. The medium will always face the issue of *what* to show from the "unrepresentable imaginary of warfare" (Lazaridès 91) and *how* to show it. One must not forget that, in comparison to film and television, theatre or dance-theatre has limited means when faced with representing the real. The difficulty of producing one realistic aesthetic on stage is also the key for artists to find creative dramatic possibilities that would allow them to avoid trivializing violence. When a war story is executed as theatre, the audience cannot forget the *mise-en-scéne* of the story told; however, the realism of spectacular violence easily found on screen tends to abolish the idea of *mise-en-scéne* (Charbonneau 32). The idea that what is shown on television is not a construct—an idea that is especially strong when talking about breaking news or the documentary genre—is dangerous, troubling the boundaries of verisimilitude, veracity (or truth), and the real effective (or real actual). On the other hand, the foretold stylization of reality on stage promotes diverse treatments of violence, where each and every usage of violence has to justify its relevance. Theatre audiences do not easily accept mimetic violence without justification. Unlike some in the filmmaking industry, performing art audiences and performers refuse the argument that entertainment is a justification for portraying trivial violence.

Furthermore, the use of physical violence in theatre that is not played but imitated or copied from the realm of what one might call *reality* is very perilous. The audience might see it as aggressive, feeling abused themselves. Examples are rare, but when obscene violent acts are shown on a stage rather than on a screen, they must always be in the context of a production that gives them meaning and coherence in relation to the play in order to be effective (Lévesque). The most meaningful scenes of violence—the rape scene in *Encounter* can be considered one—are choreographies that are carefully justified. The imitation of the real actual can make spectators feel vulnerable, incapable of distancing themselves from the overwhelming construction of reality and the aestheticization of violence. Thanks to the craft of its *mise-en-scéne*, *Encounter* succeeds in denouncing and thwarting warfare. Indeed, it perfectly performs the latter within the limits of its genre. If performing arts were to give the illusion of reality, they would be a tomb for imagination and creativity (Lazaridès).

Sometimes the power of language is self-sufficient. Theatre performers understand that there is not always the need to define words, especially when the words are strong enough. The English language is violent enough that you do not need weapons on stage to add value to it. This being said, words are not always the best option. A "drawing, a song, a rhythm, a movement" can facilitate the representation of violence (Thompson et al.). The strength of *Encounter* resides in its hybridity—in its multiplicity of art forms presented all at once within the dance-theatre genre.

The presence of dance creates a critical distance between the spectators and the performers, and also provides the audience with a greater freedom of interpretation. Each dance has its significance, but it is up to the audience to accept the suggestion or not. The dance-theatre genre breaks away from the danger of the aesthetic of realism even more than theatre. The restricted text offers—or obliges—the performers and creators to deal with the symbolic, and therefore to deal with representing something non-identifiable at first sight, since it is set in the realm of non-figurative forms.

To return, then, to the question posed above by the editors of *Performance in Place of War*: NDT's Montreal performance of *Encounter* illustrates that there *is* a performance style—that is, dance-theatre—which is more effective than others in responding to the need of expressing and dissipating the terror of warfare. And it does this precisely because dance-theatre does not want to reproduce, imitate, or copy. For instance, the violent sexual offence to which Dopdi is subjected, if played as is, would have been a "surpresence of violence become abject" (Campeau 21)—and thus would have been rendered ineffective. The symbolism of that decisive rape dance restores our ability to imagine without dissolving the signified violence to which this aestheticized act is referring. To a certain extent, this act becomes cathartic, not so much for the audience who may somehow identify themselves and be emotionally purging a sense of terror and pity, but more for the performative creators. They create a cathartic event for themselves and for the people who are present in that space of war rather than in the safe space of the theatre.

The fact that performative violence is almost always simulated, symbolized, and mediated leaves more space for viewers to receive and analyze it. Theatricalization provides the distance we need to be critical. That very distance ensures that the represented violence does not become obscene, and therefore that the aesthetic does not drown the ethical and moral.

## NOTES

1 *Encounter* was created by artists Aparna Sindhoor and Anil Natyaveda. It was written by S. M. Raju and Aparna Sindhoor in collaboration with Rahul Varma, choreographed by Aparna Sindhoor and Anil Natyaveda, and directed by Aparna Sindhoor. It features Aparna Sindhoor, Anil Natyaveda, Rajesh Raveendran, Raghu Narayanan and Smitha Radhakrishnan. The music was created by Isaac Thomas Kottukapalli.

2 Navasara Dance Theater. www.navasara.org (20 May 2011).

3 In the context of colonialism, the British classified Indian tribes in order to have better control over them, and created a category of tribes labeled as criminal. Thse tribes were listed under the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871. Devi's story is about one tribal woman battling inequity within the context of these anti-colonial struggles.

4 The geographical location of the conflict and its time remain unnamed in the version presented in Montreal. The original performance presented at the Julie Thompson Theater at the Dance Complex in Cambridge (Massachusetts) was a bit different and indeed localized the conflict in India.

5 Program from performance of *Encounter*.

6 Dance-theatre is more than a combination of two mediums; it constitutes a genre on its own. It uses expressiveness and drama within a choreographical vocabulary. In dance-theatre, the choreographers are the primary creators. Music, script, and storyline emerge as the creative process goes by (see Sanchez-Colberg). *Encounter* is narrated and sung by the dancers themselves.

7 For more detailed information on *Performance in Place of War*, see James McKinnon's review-essay in *alt.theatre: cultural diversity and the stage* 8.3 (2011): 35-38.

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© Elizabeth Bear / Background photo, Taken at the Guy Hill Indian Residential School in The Pas, Manitoba, in the 1960s.
© Derek Gunnlaugson / Marvin Smoker, Susan Olson, David Boulanger, Tracey McCorrister in the 1999 Brandon production of *Misty Lake*.

The play *Misty Lake* had its premiere in Winnipeg in July 1999 and has since had productions in Alberta, British Columbia, and other parts of Manitoba. It was produced at the 2001 Crazy Horse Aboriginal Theatre Festival in Calgary with Tantoo Cardinal and Tina Keeper in the cast.

# *An Act of Healing:* Playwrights Dale Lakevold and Darrell Racine on *Misty Lake*

BY DALE LAKEVOLD AND DARRELL RACINE

It has been published in three editions, most recently in 2008 by Loon Books in Winnipeg, and it continues to be studied at universities and high schools in Manitoba. The play was written on the basis of interviews between Darrell Racine and Elizabeth Samuel. In what follows, Racine and co-writer Dale Lakevold talk about the genesis of the play.

**DL:** *It has been twelve years now since* Misty Lake *was first produced in Winnipeg. Would you briefly describe the story of the play?*

**DR:** *Misty Lake* is a story about healing from the residential school experience. The main characters are Mary, who attended residential school and has come to terms with what happened to her there, and Patty, a Metis reporter, who has gone north to find out more about the residential school experience. As the story progresses, we find out that Patty's grandmother had been at residential school and that Patty herself is feeling the effects of intergenerational problems due to her grandmother's experience. The story is about Mary assisting Patty in overcoming some of those problems.

**DL:** *Let's talk about the origins of the play by first discussing your own experience growing up in southwestern Manitoba in the 1960s and 1970s.*

**DR:** I grew up in a Metis family living outside of a small town in southwestern Manitoba. It wasn't a typical life compared to the lives of other, non-Aboriginal families in the area. As a child, I had the sense that we were different. We were coming from a different background—and, in fact, the school seemed somewhat foreign. We couldn't really figure out what the problem was, but we couldn't, for example, advocate for the Metis or talk about the history of the Metis people. Back then we didn't know what the term *Metis* was. They used the term *half-breed*. And that was, in a sense, how we knew ourselves. We knew ourselves as half-breeds, and that was how we were named by that outside community.

**DL:** *Some thirty years later, by the 1990s, you ended up teaching at Brandon University. You didn't make it through high school, but still you went on to study at Harvard and Cambridge and were looking ahead to doctoral studies at Oxford. By January 1998 you were getting ready to go north to Lac Brochet, Manitoba, to conduct academic research.*

**DR:** It was an interesting situation, going north. In one sense I wasn't prepared, but in many other ways I was. I'd gotten some research money for a proposal and arranged to go up there to do some interviews, but I knew that there was no way I'd be able to do exactly what I'd proposed while I was there. I entered the community with an open mind. I had my tape recorder, but I wasn't sure what kind of stories I was going to get or what exactly I was going to find.

I'd previously been involved with some residential school healing camps. I'd gone to them with friends I was in school with as an undergrad. That was my connection to Lac Brochet. I'd been to many Cree communities in the North, and I'd adjusted to them well. I could use my Metis background in the sense that there were things in the culture that were somewhat similar to my own. I could understand some of the Cree terminology, the humour, the form of the humour, the way it was delivered. I could understand that. But in this particular case, I was going into a Dene community, and, in fact, when I was there I went through a bit of culture shock. It's a fundamentally different culture, though at least I had some background in hunting and trapping—which is what, for the most part, the community's way of life is based on. So it wasn't entirely foreign to me—wild meat, trapping, hunting caribou. These things made that world somewhat known to me. I was unprepared, but I had a bit of an inside edge.

**DL:** *You ended up interviewing Elizabeth Samuel, whose life became the basis for the play. Why did you want to talk to her in particular?*

**DR:** I wanted to talk to Elizabeth because I'd been a helper for her during her vision quest at one of the residential school healing camps. That's a generic term, by the way, *vision quest*. It's not called that in Cree or Dene terminology. Probably *fasting* would be a better term. At any rate, I'd assisted her during those days and we'd become close friends, and I knew that she had a very deep understanding of the human condition. The experiences that she'd brought herself through had given her an insight into the human condition that I hadn't seen in other human beings.

**DL:** *The interviews with Elizabeth are fascinating when you hear them on tape. Could you describe how they were conducted? How did you manage to talk to her about some of the really difficult experiences that she'd dealt with and was continuing to deal with at that time?*

**DR:** There is a real element of trust, I think, when you support someone in ceremony. You come to know them very, very well. You create a foundation of trust. If you look at the interview in the book [*Misty Lake*] that was published, you'll see that the questions I asked were very straightforward. You wouldn't say poignant, but I don't hold back with the questions nor does she hold back with the answers. So there's a real sense of truth coming through, if you will. When there's that much trust between interviewer and interviewee, what comes out is a profound sense of reality.

**DL:** *You came back with about five hours of recorded interviews with Elizabeth. Now, writing a play based on those interviews wasn't the first project you had in mind. What did you have in mind? And how did the idea of a play sound to you when you first considered it?*

**DR:** When I returned to Brandon and I had all this material, the first thing I did was to start thinking about how it could be used. When we started the interview, I already knew that it wouldn't take the form of a standard academic text that you'd find in anthropology or sociology or something like that. In fact, the material had a depth that could in no way be communicated in that form. Prior to going up there, I'd been talking with you about doing a play, so when I came back, it seemed to be a possibility. I approached you, suggesting we could do something with the material. I handed the tapes over, and about three months later, after you'd listened to all the tapes and thought about it, you said that maybe there was a play in there. That's how it all got started.

**DL:** *This play is a fictionalized work, but it's based on the life of your friend, Elizabeth. What was it like for you to work on a piece of theatre in which you were dealing with very personal experiences of another person's life and accepting the responsibilities of making a theatrical work from that material?*

**DR:** First of all, before you can do that, you have to have a basic premise to work from. Elizabeth had said to me, I think it's on the tape somewhere, that *this is my story and I give it to you*. In other words, the story had been gifted, which then opened up the possibility of using it to communicate to another audience. It has to start with a premise like that. If you don't have permission, then you can't go ahead. And then you have to be very respectful and truthful to the interview.

**DL:** *From what I remember, we showed her the script before it was produced, is that right?*

**DR:** Yes, we did. We sent it up. We also made sure she saw the production. I felt comfortable enough with the way we'd produced the play to know she would like it. Because there was a sense of truth in the play. There weren't any major inconsistencies in it from the interviews.

**DL:** *By the time the play was written and ready to be staged in July 1999, did you have any hopes for it? We were examining the residential school experience and the life of a Dene woman from northern Manitoba. Who would be interested in a play like that?*

**DR:** My first hope was that it would get to an Aboriginal audience, that it would have the effect that was intended, namely to assist people on their healing journey or maybe to start people on their healing journey or to help them complete that journey. In other words, if you'd been through that residential school experience or if you were suffering from intergenerational abuses, then maybe those people could find something in it that meant something to them. It might assist them in overcoming the difficulties in their lives caused by these unfortunate events in history.

© Elizabeth Bear / Taken at the Guy Hill Indian Residential School in The Pas, Manitoba, in the 1960s.

**DL:** *Ten years later, the federal government issued a formal apology for the injustices and abuses that Aboriginal people experienced during the residential school period. We know about the long-term effects of this experience and how Canada's history has been shaped by Aboriginal people and their encounter with colonialism. Are the concerns in* Misty Lake *relevant today?*

**DR:** Certainly, on the intergenerational level, many Aboriginal people are going to continue to suffer from the residential school experience for a long time to come. This play, in other words, is going to be relevant for quite some time. Even in fifty or one hundred years, this play will continue to speak to people. It will have a level of information or knowledge that they won't be able to glean from any other sources. People will continue to learn from it.

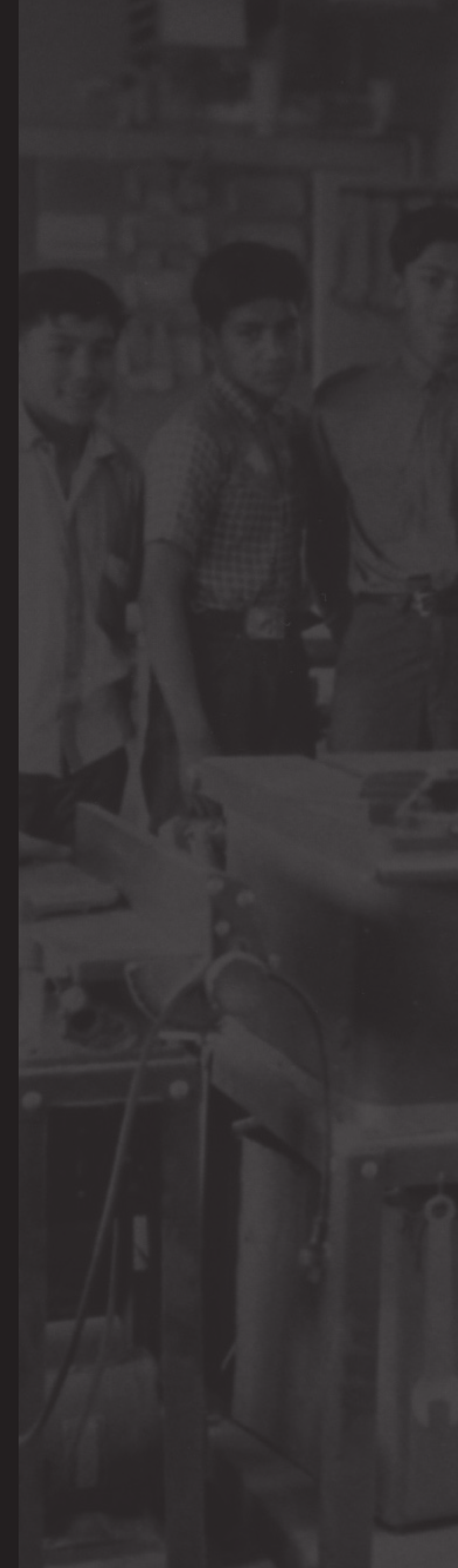
**DL:** *You referred briefly to suffering. What did you mean by that?*

**DR:** I think that cultures that are relatively intact take it for granted that suffering is something that you overcome over time. Certainly, that's true, but what those people don't understand is that when you take some of the fundamental elements of human culture from a particular population, then suffering becomes a much different problem. When a culture forgets how to suffer—and that is certainly what has happened to Aboriginal people through the residential school experience—then those people have no way to understand the context of their pain.

The anthropologist Clifford Geertz said that the purpose of human existence should never be to stop or to repress suffering. Rather, it should be to know how to suffer. Because, as human beings, we will always suffer. We will always have those events in our lives that will give us pain. But if you don't know how to suffer—if you don't know how to reduce that pain or bring some horrific situation in your life to a conclusion—then you are indeed in trouble as a culture. This is exactly what happened through the residential school experience. It took the ability to suffer away from Aboriginal people. It took it all away from them: their context, their world, their families, their history, and so on. If you don't know how to suffer, then what happens is that the pain remains constant over time. It doesn't diminish. In ordinary circumstances, when we have a death in the family, then the pain of that loss starts to diminish over time. If a culture is robbed of that ability, then that pain remains constant. I'd make the argument that that's why we have high suicide rates in Aboriginal communities, for example. It's a result of the inability to know how to suffer.

**DL:** *Finally, where are Aboriginal people in Canada at in their history right now? What does the future hold for Aboriginal people and their cultures?*

DR: With regard to healing, that's going to continue for quite some time. It's taken five hundred years of colonialism to run its course to this point, and we're not going to heal from it in twenty, fifty, or one hundred years. Having said that, one of the things that has come from this oppression is that Aboriginal people have had to revive their ceremonies. They have had to make their ceremonies stronger. They have had to make their ceremonies look at colonialism and at the horrific experiences that people have had as a result of colonialism. This process is going to put Aboriginal people in a very special place in the future. They will have a great reservoir of understanding and ceremony that will be able to assist many different cultures in overcoming famine and war, for example. What the Aboriginal people have come through has made them stronger, and it will continue to make them stronger. In this respect, they will in fact be the future leaders on a global level.



## Place Matters

When I learned that Ex Machina and the Huron-Wendat Nation were working on a production of Shakespeare's *Tempest*, to be performed by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal actors in the French translation of Michel Garneau, I determined to be there. The appeal was less Robert Lepage or *The Tempest* than the Huron-Wendat nation and the village of Wendake where it was to be presented. I was drawn to the place whose reserve had been the model for the fictional Kinogamish in *Hamlet-le-Malécite* by Yves Sioui Durand.

At the time I did not realize the importance of Wendake's outdoor amphitheatre, carved into a slope above a magnificent stand of mature trees overlooking the St-Charles river as the play's location. Only gradually did I realize that unlike other productions in which Prospero's island is a metaphor for land claimed by colonial settlers, in this production it was that land itself. Without its place of its performance, this performance would lose its significance.

In his program notes, Robert Lepage emphasizes the place. He describes having long believed that in a collaboration of Ex Machina with artists of the Huron-Wendat Nation, their Québécois and First Nations cultures and imaginaries would combine to shed new light on Shakespeare's play. For this encounter, he admits, he coveted their magnificent site and performance space, which transformed Prospero's "island" into a suggestion of virgin boreal forest.

This is the only *Tempest* I have seen that was not assumed to take place on a desert(ed) island. Lepage maps the play onto the founding of Quebec. He reads it as an allegory of the meeting between the old (European) world and a new world in which his Prospero is greeted by a population of strange spirits—First Nations people he doesn't recognize as human—who show him the beauties of the place. Prospero abuses their hospitality, making Ariel his servant and Caliban his slave, and deploys his brutal "magic" to subject their basically matriarchal culture to his colonial domination.

In this reading, as suggested by the scenography, Caliban and Ariel are products of the world out of which their community and culture grow. The staging saw a continuity between the events of the play and the physical environment of the First Nations reserve in which the play was being performed. In the words of J. Kelly Nestruck (*Globe and Mail*, 8 July 2011), "Shakespeare' s fantasy world spill[ed] out over the thrust stage and flow[ed] deep into the woods behind [. . .] filled with hidden lights and speakers." Beyond the circular platform, to which Prospero' s world was largely confined, were the trees whose heights were Ariel's habitat. And abutting the stage was an intimate semi-circle of spectators, out of which emerged a First Nations family into which Caliban was ultimately absorbed. First Nations performers, recognizable to audience members, did not disappear into their roles. Renowned singer Kathia Rock, of the Maliotenam reserve, sang Ariel's songs translated into the Innu language and musical idiom. And the First Nations family was recognizable as members of the Troupe Sandokwa, adults and youngsters internationally known for their traditional (and modern) dances and songs.

Among the Europeans, the only the scenes that matched the energy and texture of the First Nations music, dance, and acrobatics were those infused with circus skills, such as of Jean-François Faber as Étranglé (Trinculo). Only Ferdinand, set to the task of hauling logs, participated directly in this world. Described in the program as a "bucheron [lumberjack]—acrobate," he threw his axe, in an iconic moment, and split a tree trunk seemingly as tall as the tall trees behind it. The gesture evoked Prospero's release of the imprisoned Ariel from the cloven pine (although he once again imprisoned her in his service) as well as the deforestation of First Nations lands.

Prospero's last speech was not directed, as in Shakespeare's text, to the theatre audience to free him with their applause; instead he calls on Caliban, now himself free and in possession of the axe Ferdinand had used to chop down his island's tree (Nestruck), to decide on the outcome of the relationship. Garneau's colloquial translation makes more explicit their relative positions: "la vérité c'est que vous pouvez me reconduire chez moi / ou bien me garder prisonnier sur cette île." ["Now 'tis true / I must be here confined by you, / or sent to Naples."]

The story of this *Tempest* is rooted in the land on which it has taken place. To this day, land claim remains central for First Nations nationhood. Though the production was a collaborative enterprise, it was not a sharing of common ground. For all the expertise and prestige brought by Ex Machina and Robert Lepage, the host community remained the Huron-Wendat Nation sharing its ground. The press release announcing the production stressed that this was a unique (in the sense of a one-time) event. Unlike other Ex Machina productions, this one would not tour internationally. It was not to be detached from the place of its creation.

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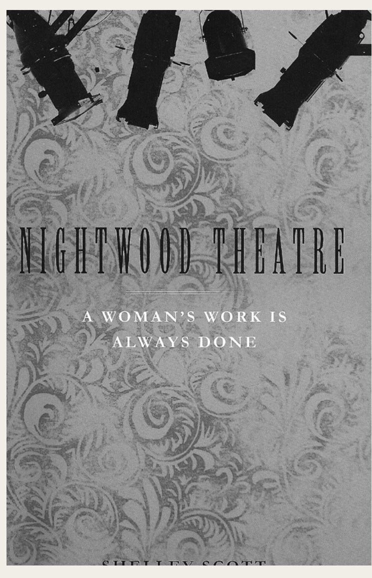
© Renaud Philippe / Jean Guy as Prospero




*Nightwood Theatre:A Woman's Work Is Always Done*

**BY SHELLEY SCOTT
EDMONTON: ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2010. PP. 344.
ALSO AVAILABLE FOR DOWNLOAD AS AN E-BOOK OR A FREE PDF AT HTTP://WWW.AUPRESS.CA/INDEX.PHP/BOOKS/120168#.T2IUC5JPO20**

# *Book review*

## BY MICHELLE MACARTHUR

Shelley Scott's *Nightwood Theatre: A Woman's Work Is Always Done* is a highly anticipated study of one of Canada's pre-eminent women's theatres, drawing on archival research, textual analysis, and artist interviews to examine Nightwood's ongoing negotiation of its self- and public identity. Originating in Scott's 1997 doctoral dissertation, this book has been substantially revised and expanded, now covering the Toronto-based company's history from its founding in 1979 to its thirtieth anniversary in 2009. With an overarching focus on "contextualizing Nightwood in terms of feminist theory and history" (11), Scott demonstrates that feminism is neither static nor monolithic, and that Nightwood's identity and achievements have been the result of the company's ability to respond to developments in feminist theory and embrace its pluralism.

While the book is organized chronologically, Scott resists constructing a strictly linear history in several ways. First, she takes advantage of her long view of the company, weaving thematic threads together across time and underlining connections between major productions. For example, in her discussion of Susan G. Cole's *A Fertile Imagination* (1991) she draws a comparison to Diane Flacks' *Bear With Me* (2005) in order to highlight how historical context—in this case, gay and lesbian rights in Canada—shapes a play's meanings for particular audiences. Second, Scott rightfully problematizes both the "Wave model" (a chronological framework that divides the women's movement into three major phases, or waves, according to key concerns and demands) and the boundaries between different categories of feminism. Scott shows, for example, how work produced during the second wave anticipated third wave concerns, or how cultural and materialist feminist perspectives and strategies can co-exist in the same play and/or in its production. Finally, she avoids claiming a definitive version of the company's history, highlighting but not resolving members' conflicting accounts when it comes to questions like whether Nightwood actually operated as a collective in its early years. To complement this decidedly feminist approach to history writing, the appendix features a 69-page chronology detailing the company's activities from 1979 to 2009—an indispensable resource for future research on Nightwood.

The introduction explores the historical, political, and artistic conditions that facilitated Nightwood's founding and eventual adoption of a feminist mandate. Scott elaborates the three main contexts framing her

study: feminist theory; feminist theatre practice, primarily in Canada and the US; and the theory and practice of collective creation in Canada. Scott spends a significant amount of time positioning Nightwood's work within the landscape of women's theatre, drawing useful comparisons to such companies as the Women's Theatre Project, the oldest and largest company in the US committed to producing the work of women playwrights (founded in 1978). The latter half of the introduction is dedicated to defining collective creation, its deep roots in Canadian theatre history, and how it aligns with feminist theory and praxis. Scott shows why Nightwood initially gravitated towards this kind of work, though she also briefly points out some of the drawbacks of working collectively, noting the company's struggles with, and eventual rejection of, this format. However, despite various artistic directors' attempts to distance Nightwood from its collective roots, the concepts of collectivity and collaboration have remained attached to the company's identity.

Scott divides the book's three chapters according to major phases in Nightwood's development. Chapter one covers the beginning years, from 1979 to 1988, and tracks the company's ongoing struggle to define itself in the landscape of what Denis Johnston terms the "third wave" of alternative theatres in Toronto—companies established in the late 1970s and early 1980s whose longevity can be credited to the new and unique perspectives they offered (57). One thing that distinguishes Nightwood from other women's companies established around the same time, such as Toronto's Redlight Theatre (1974) and Montreal's Théâtre Expérimental des Femmes (TEF) (1979), is that it did not initially form as a feminist theatre company. Rather, its co-founders were focused on producing imagistic and experimental work. Nightwood's feminist mandate developed over a number of years through complex negotiations involving its ways of working, artistic and thematic interests, public perceptions, and growing recognition of the gender disparity in Canadian theatre.

As Scott examines this transition through an analysis of a diverse array of archival materials, she also continues to trace Nightwood's shift from a company focused on working collectively to one producing single-authored work. It is significant that the first chapter ends in 1988, a year after its final mainstage collective creation, *The Last Will and Testament of Lolita*. Subtitled "a vile pink comedy" and described in publicity materials as "Four bad girls steal, revise and reconstruct the Lolita Myth" (97), the production was ultimately a critical and artistic failure. Co-creator Banuta Rubess attributes this to reviewers' gender bias and resistance to collective work, and to the company's attempt to "wed madcap humour with strong image work," which was found to alienate much of the audience (97-98). This production, as Scott suggests, illustrates some of the pitfalls of collective creation and reflects the company's ongoing struggle to be understood by the mainstream press, a theme that surfaces throughout the book.

Chapter two documents the period from 1989 to 1993 when, under Kate Lushington's artistic directorship, Nightwood embraced and projected a more explicitly feminist and anti-racist agenda while simultaneously—and perhaps paradoxically—moving more into the mainstream with successes like Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* and the adoption of a more traditional organizational structure. Close readings of the plays staged during this time reveal the complex configurations of feminisms found in Nightwood's oeuvre. Scott's analysis of *Goodnight Desdemona*, in particular, stands out. While valuable for its nuanced examination of the play's enduring appeal and early exploration of third wave politics, it is somewhat of an anomaly in its length and almost exclusive focus on text over production history. This can perhaps be justified by the play's influential role in the company's development, as its unprecedented widespread success (it went on to win a Governor General's Literary Award and a Chalmer's Canadian Play Award for best production ) significantly raised Nightwood's public profile.

Scott's extended focus on *Goodnight Desdemona* might also be explained by the fact that this section is based on an article that she published in *Resources for Feminist Research* in 2006. Here, as in the article, Scott offers an original analysis, arguing that the play's sustained popularity, particularly amongst young women, is rooted in its alignment with third wave feminism and postmodernism—its "breaching of boundaries between high and low culture, and the simultaneous embrace and critique of its source material" (120). Its anticipation of third wave feminism, she suggests, is reflected not only in its exposure of gender and sexuality as fluid and performed rather than static and fixed, but in its playful approach to this critique. MacDonald's characters alter their sexuality with the simple addition or removal of an item of clothing, taking pleasure in flouting and subverting norms, just as young feminists celebrate the "fluidity of sexual choice" (121) and myriad incarnations of desire. While Scott's argument relies on a close reading of the dramatic text, her consideration of the material conditions of performance and production shows how elements such as casting, costuming, direction, and audience can shape meaning and further support a third wave reading of the play.

Chapter three looks at the leadership models undertaken by Nightwood in the 1990s to the present day, dividing this vast time into two periods according to significant shifts in artistic directorship: 1994 to 2000, when the company was led by Diane Roberts and Alisa Palmer (with Palmer taking on sole leadership after 1996), and 2001 to 2009, when Nightwood's current artistic director, Kelly Thornton, began her tenure. Under Roberts' and Palmer's lead, the company's commitment to anti-racism and diversity continued to develop both in its operations, through a concerted effort to create space for women from diverse backgrounds through new play development and job opportunities within the company, and in its mainstage productions, which included Djanet Sears' *Harlem Duet* (1997) and Alex Bulmer's *Smudge* (2000). At the same time, the company began to shift towards a more traditional administrative structure, which was solidified when Thornton took over in 2001 with the aim of positioning Nightwood as "Canada's national women's theatre" (171).

Both Palmer's and Thornton's focus on defining Nightwood's artistic vision and demands meant that its politics were not emphasized in its mandate statement or publicity

materials to the extent that they were in previous years. Scott's materialist approach offers a rich discussion of this issue, considering the company's need to attract larger audiences and more varied funding sources in the competitive Toronto theatre scene, as well as internal dynamics and differing feelings about feminism amongst its members. Scott suggests that this ambivalence surrounding feminism is reflective of the movement more generally at the time. Feminism was losing some of its mainstream appeal, partially due to critiques from poststructuralists and anti-essentialists, who problematized the meaning of the term "woman" and the movement's inclusiveness.

Chapter three also contains an examination of some of the key productions during this time, including Marjorie Chan's *China Doll* (2004), Lisa Codrington's *Cast Iron* (2006), and Linda Griffiths' *Age of Arousal* (2008), and discusses how these plays and others reflect Nightwood's increasingly national and international outlook. Not only was Nightwood presenting work that reflected a greater diversity of Canadian women's voices, but its production choices were also influenced by the international repertoire. For instance, Diane Roberts' *The Coloured Girls Project* (1995) drew inspiration from American Ntozake Shange's *for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is not enuf* (1975). As another example, Nightwood's 2007 season featured the first professional production of British playwright Sarah Kane's *Crave* in Toronto. The company also presented its own work on the international stage: one of its most successful shows during this period was Sonja Mills' *The Danish Play*, about the Danish Resistance movement of World War II, which premiered in 2002 and toured to Denmark in 2004. This transnational focus allowed Nightwood to reach out to different communities within Toronto and to introduce audiences to new and exciting voices they might not otherwise have had access to—something that remains a priority today.

The final chapter sums up the main characteristics of Nightwood's work and history through the framework of feminist theatre criticism. Scott brings together germinal theoretical texts, including Sue-Ellen Case's *Feminism and Theatre* (1988), Jill Dolan's *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (1988), and Gayle Austin's *Feminist Theories for Dramatic Criticism* (1990), along with texts dealing with postmodernism, post-feminism, and third wave feminism, such as Linda Hutcheon's *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989); Sarah Gamble's edited collection, *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism* (2001); and Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake's *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism* (1997). Her elucidation of this work constitutes a thorough survey of the field and is a helpful resource for students and researchers alike. I question, however, the placement of this section at the end of the book: while it provides a coherent end to the study by referencing earlier examples to draw more general conclusions about the different approaches to studying and creating feminist theatre, some of the basic definitions provided here would be useful at the beginning of the book.

As a relatively new feminist scholar, I often face the question of whether this approach to the study and practice of theatre is relevant at a time when many young women no longer identify with the feminist movement—when the "f" word is often preceded by a "post," reflecting either a backlash against feminism or the belief in its irrelevance altogether. Scott's study provides a strong answer to this question. She shows the original and important insights that feminism, particularly third wave feminism, can provide as a tool for dramatic criticism and history writing. Further, she underscores the ongoing need for theatres like Nightwood to create opportunities not otherwise available for women. Nightwood has nurtured the careers of multiple generations of women in Canada—writers, directors, actors, designers—making an indelible impact on theatre in this country. Scott convincingly argues that although Nightwood has moved away from its radical beginnings, its unwavering support of women theatre makers is in and of itself a political and feminist act. The company's survival today is a testament to its ability to continually redefine its identity and strategically negotiate its feminist politics in order to achieve its aims while appealing to a broad audience.

For me this is somewhat of a double-edged sword: Nightwood's adaptability and move closer to the centre have ensured its longevity and ongoing ability to support women's creative endeavors, but this has also meant that its work—in both form and content—no longer challenges conventions or pushes boundaries as it once did. Indeed, I question some of Nightwood's recent offerings for their problematic representations of women, and I wonder if there is room for this kind of criticism in Scott's analysis. The balance between playing in the mainstream and finding power in the margins is a complex issue but one that merits more discussion in relation to Nightwood's work, especially given its self-identification as a national women's theatre.

Scott's study inspires newer scholars to continue the work of the previous generation. In the Canadian context, more projects like this need to be undertaken to document and preserve our growing feminist theatre tradition. As Scott concludes in her final chapter, "So many women have worked hard, not just at Nightwood, but in feminist theatres internationally, and in journalism, and in scholarship. All that can be easily lost, especially in the ephemeral world of theatre production or the peripatetic nature of a nomadic theatre company" (224). Companies like the TEF (1979-1987) and Winnipeg's Nellie McClung Theatre (1976-1980) are in need of the same kind of book-length studies so that their archival materials can be collected in one place and analyzed in a more focused and extensive way than they currently are in journal articles and play introductions. *Nightwood Theatre: A Woman's Work Is Always Done* provides a solid model for this type of work.

# Eulogy for Madeleine Parent

BY DAVID FENNARIO

I met Madeleine Parent three times

First time during the Oka Crisis
It was the night the troops moved in on the barricades at Kanewake with armed intent
When the news flashed hundreds of us sat down on the street in front of the Hydro-Quebec building, expecting the riot squad to arrest us at any minute
Madeleine was sitting quite close by me, a woman then in her seventies
People were scared, I was scared
Madeleine's face didn't even change

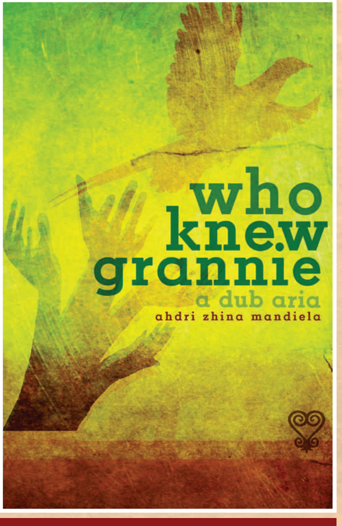
Second time in 2005 at a launcement of Anna Kruzynski's book on community organizing in the Pointe
As an invited speaker I later met with Madeleine and we spoke for the first time
Told her I was a maudit bloke de souche like Kent Rowley and she laughed
She was far from being some kind of uptight doctrinaire, humourless and puritanical
It was her love of life that made her such a good fighter

Third time in late winter of 2011 when Martin Duckworth took me to see her in her nursing home
Single room simple with bed table, computer and photos of comrades and union mates on the walls along with souvenir posters of past struggles
She had just about lost all long term memory but still clear in her mind in the moment
One good look into her eyes and you knew that this woman with her serene smile was still that woman who backed down Maurice Duplessis himself
Just a few years before at the age of 87 she had organized the patients in the home against an All Lights Out At 10:00 o'clock restriction
She won

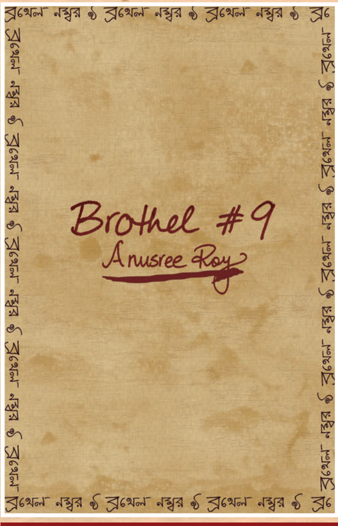
She went out fighting

*Salut Madeleine salut camarade*

**ROBERT CHAFE** *OIL AND WATER* · OUT NOW




**AHDRI ZHINA MANDIELA** *WHO KNEW GRANNIE* · JUNE

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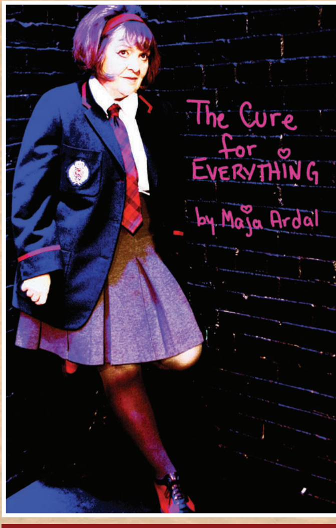


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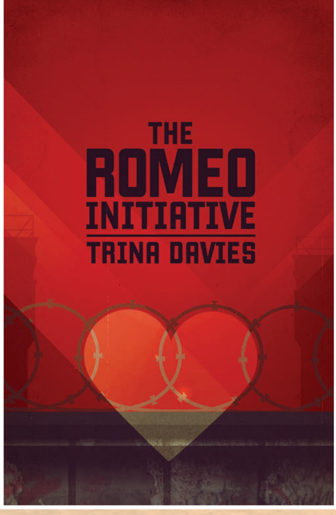


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