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Video, Film and Play Reviews

In the cover photo Robyn Lafontaine (age 7), engrossed in her role as Sir Toby Belch, helps Ali Kara (age 7) move into his part, in Lois Burdett's classroom production of ***Twelfth Night*** *(see the Profile on page 41 of this issue). Photo courtesy of Scott Wishart,* ***The Beacon Herald.***

La photographie de la couverture montre Robyn Lafontaine (7 ans) dans le rôle de Sir Toby Belch; elle aide Ali Kara (7 ans) à jouer le sien dans la mise en scène de ***La Nuit des rois*** *de Lois Burdett (sur cet exercice scolaire, voir la présentation à la page 41 du présent numéro). Photographie de Scott Wishart, du* ***Beacon Herald.***

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La page "web" de CCL/LCJ présente le protocole de rédaction, la table des matières des numéros récents, les tarifs de l'abonnement, des échantillons de comptes rendus et un index général de la revue. Cet index peut être consulté grâce au programme Schoolnet (adresse: http://www.uoguelph.ca/englit.ccl/).

Editorial: Building Children, Building Bridges: Young People's Drama

Whether with puppets or live performers, through interactive theatre or issue-based plays, dramatists and producers in Canada have tried, in a time of stringent cutbacks to the arts and to schools, to grab the imaginations of young people, to train them to think, and to make them see themselves. While Calgary playwright and producer JoAnne James feels that drama has the potential to "challenge [young people] to go forward in a different direction" by possibly providing them with an "epic moment" in the darkened world of the theatre, David Hersh and Alex Sideris of Ottawa's Orleans Young Players and the innovative Encore!, feel more generally that young people's drama encourages creative problem-solving, self-discovery, risk-taking, and group-building. And for anyone who has seen James's *Moving Day* or *Willa and Sam* or one of Encore!'s student-run productions (where thirteen-year-olds not only star in the plays, but also direct them, produce them, advertise them, budget for them, and sell you Rice Krispie squares at intermission), one feels compelled to conclude that the talent in Canadian Young People's Theatre is astounding. Its ambitions are, then, appropriately lofty: Sara Lee Lewis of Nova Scotia's Mermaid Theatre, notable for its blend of puppets and performers, feels that her troupe can "work to ensure excellent standards of puppetry," and, when touring, can operate as "cultural ambassadors for the Annapolis Valley, for Nova Scotia, and for Canada." The majority opinion about the efficacy of YPT is probably sounded by JoAnne James (quoting Kevin Locke): "It's easier to build children than repair adults" ... Indeed, all of the contributors to this special issue will tell you how convinced they are that drama fosters moral, intellectual, emotional and aesthetic development.

Why, then, if there is such potential in children's theatre, is there such strife surrounding the staging and touring of productions? Maria DiCenzo's lead article helps us understand that the answer to this question is probably at least three-fold: (1) The audiences — especially of issue-based plays toured to schools — are dual: educators and parents on the one hand, and politicians and bureaucrats on the other. Unlike producers of adult theatre, the producers of children's theatre cannot simply listen to their own artistic impulses: they have to answer to educators and bureaucrats, too. (2) Since there is no national curriculum, the staging of a production, or of any piece of art, will depend on what province you live in and what political party rules. (3) Theatre for young audiences, like much literature for young people, does not have the respect accorded adult theatre. As DiCenzo argues, "the pedagogical and advocacy aspects" of issue-based theatre for young people, "the very features that make it so important in the wider community — are considered to be antithetical to 'art'." And it is for this reason, as Daniel Chouinard argues, that the awarding of three Masques to Jasmine Dubé's children's play, *La Bonne Femme*, has created something of a scandal: it was

treated alongside *adult* plays. Alongside them as equals. And it *won* for best direction and best new play.

Why, also, if Canadian YPT shows such promise, is there such a tendency to be blasé about it? A lack of exposure to drama and to drama criticism seems to be the culprit here. As Sarah Lee Lewis notes, "children need to develop a vocabulary to discuss what they are seeing, and to appreciate the medium of live presentation." Without knowledgeable teachers, without drama courses, school theatres, and visiting troupes, young people may only ever see live theatre as an embarrassing exercise in hyperbole. As you will see in "Partners in Practice," Lorraine Behnan's article on her ambitious university course on "Theatre for Young Audiences," Behnan aims to counteract any awkwardness borne of ignorance or incomprehension through innovative teaching strategies implemented in a partnership program. If we are, according to JoAnne James, "raising the audience of tomorrow" in our young people's plays today, then clearly, we do not want them to grow up imagining mega-musicals are "real theatre." If we want them exposed to honest drama that is not always "safe" and not always twinkly, then we need to build bridges between dramatists and bureaucrats, plays and audiences, to ensure that children may still find an "epic moment" in the dark of their school theatre.

Marie C. Davis

Présentation: Le théâtre pour la jeunesse au Canada anglais

Au Canada anglais, malgré une série noire de coupures budgétaires dans les activités culturelles des écoles primaires et secondaires, les dramaturges et les metteurs en scène tentent de frapper l'imagination des jeunes spectateurs, d'éveiller leur intelligence et de cristalliser leur prise de conscience des problèmes auquels ils sont confrontés, à l'aide de moyens techniques variés et de pièces au contenu axé sur les problèmes que vivent les jeunes. Ainsi, pour des praticiens du théâtre pour la jeunesse comme JoAnne James de Calgary, David Hersh et Alix Sideris d'Ottawa, et Sarah Lee Lewis du Young People's Theatre de la Nouvelle-Écosse, les représentations théâtrales stimulent le développement moral, émotif et intellectuel des enfants. Mieux encore, pour ces auteurs et ces animateurs, seul le théâtre peut réconcilier les exigences de la pédagogie et les appels à la liberté de l'expérience esthétique.

Or, comment se fait-il que malgré toutes ses qualités artistiques et éducatives, le théâtre pour la jeunesse soulève autant de controverse lors des tournées des compagnies théâtrales? Selon Maria DiCenzo, l'on pourrait avancer trois explications concomitantes: d'abord, les tensions entre les aspirations esthétiques des concepteurs du spectacle et les exigences souvent inconciliables des parents, d'une part, et des autorités scolaires et politiques, d'autre part; ensuite, l'absence de programme national au Canada anglais, qui soumet les mises en scène aux pressions politiques locales et provinciales; enfin, tout comme la littérature pour la jeunesse dans son ensemble, le peu de prestige culturel des productions théâtrales pour jeunes publics: elles ne sont que trop souvent regardées de haut par les praticiens du théâtre dit sérieux, car les orientations pédagogiques et "morales" de ses productions sont jugées antiesthétiques en soi.

Toutefois, il y aurait peut-être une solution à ce manque de reconnaissance, voire ce mépris dont souffrent les praticiens oeuvrant pour la jeunesse: l'initiation des élèves et des éducateurs à la critique théâtrale. En effet, le milieu scolaire aurait avantage à encourager à la fois l'enseignement du théâtre et la mise en scène de spectacles montés et joués par les jeunes. À cet égard, l'article de Lorraine Behman montre l'urgence de créer des cours universitaires destinés aux enseignants, qui explorent de nouvelles approches pédagogiques. Enfin, ce n'est qu'en créant des liens entre les dramaturges et les autorités scolaires, entre les metteurs en scène et les spectateurs et leurs parents qu'on encouragera les jeunes à apprécier le choc de l'expérience théâtrale.

Pour nos lecteurs francophones, ce panorama du théâtre au Canada anglais est complété par un article de Daniela Di Cecco sur l'usage du journal intime dans les romans pour adolescentes: l'on sera à même de voir, dans le recours à cette forme narrative héritée en grande partie d'une pratique culturelle du XIXe siècle, toute la complexité du développement de la personnalité et des relations entre les narratrices et leurs mères.

Daniel Chouinard

Negotiating Audiences: Confronting Social Issues in Theatre for Young Audiences

• *Maria DiCenzo* •

Résumé: *Cet article examine les problèmes pratiques, esthétiques et idéologiques auxquels sont confrontées les troupes de théâtre qui produisent des pièces portant sur l'expérience vécue des jeunes et qui les présentent en milieu scolaire. Si l'école permet l'accès à la culture théâtrale à des groupes d'enfants défavorisés, il n'en reste pas moins que cet accès est contrôlé par des adultes (commissions scolaires, enseignants, parents et bailleurs de fonds). À cet égard, l'expérience de deux troupes, le Catalyst Theatre d'Edmonton et la Company of Sirens de Toronto, montre les difficultés que soulèvent l'exploration de sujets comme la violence à la maison et les abus sexuels.*

Summary: *This paper deals with the practical, aesthetic, and ideological problems facing theatre groups who choose to produce issue-based plays for young audiences in schools. In socio-economic terms, performing in schools makes theatre available to a larger cross section of young people; however, a company's access to these audiences is ultimately mediated by adults (school boards, teachers, parents and funding agencies). The paper compares the experiences of two different theatre groups — Catalyst Theatre (Edmonton) and the Company of Sirens (Toronto) — whose plays for young audiences tackled issues of sexual abuse and domestic violence. The paper concludes with a consideration of the challenges and rewards of TYA (Theatre for Young Audiences) more generally.*

The dispute between the Toronto Board of Education and Young People's Theatre over the production of *Bedtimes and Bullies* drew attention to an area of theatre work which rarely makes the news. The controversy concerned the decision to cast a young black actor in the central role of the bully. School board representatives criticized the show for reinforcing negative stereotypes of young black males, warning teachers and parents about its "suitability." YPT made some minor changes, but stood firm on their policy of colour-blind casting. Each side believed it was acting in the best interests of young audiences. The case is important because it highlights a crucial feature of Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) — relationships with and access to young audiences are mediated by bodies (school boards, teachers, parents, funding agencies) and considerations that differ from those influencing other forms of theatre. Artists must appeal to two audiences, relying on the approval and interest of educators and parents, and ultimately politicians and bureaucrats, in order to gain access to their target audience. The potential problems are magnified in the case of theatre companies that attempt to take issue-based plays, dealing with sensitive or controversial

subject matter, into schools. In this paper I will examine how two companies — Catalyst Theatre (Edmonton) and the Company of Sirens/S.I.S. (Toronto) — chose to structure and perform their school-based productions around the issues of sexual abuse and domestic violence.

While both groups set out with a commitment to using theatre as a tool for social action and to expand their work to include TYA, their experiences of working within educational settings proved to be very different. The productions I will consider were both pivotal for these companies; after struggling with the problems of a participatory learning program like *Mind Your Own Body*, Catalyst cancelled the production in mid-run and withdrew from TYA, while the Sirens, encouraged by the responses to and demand for *Whenever I Feel Afraid*, became more actively involved in school touring. Considered both individually and in relation to one another, these two cases raise important issues about the objectives, forms, and challenges TYA faces more generally.

TYA takes a variety of forms and by focusing on Catalyst and the Sirens/S.I.S., I am restricting this discussion to issue-based plays produced by professional companies and toured to schools. This type of work combines elements of both children's or young people's theatre (professional companies performing self-contained plays in theatres or other spaces)[1] and Theatre in Education/TIE (companies developing shows intended to educate children about social/political issues, but which are part of larger programs of educational activities). The convergence of pedagogical aims, the often sensitive or controversial nature of the subject matter, and the limits surrounding the "school" as a venue, place theatre artists in a complex role. Hélène Beauchamp notes:

> Whenever 'theatre' is brought *into* the schools an ambiguity arises as to its real purpose. Is it an artistic experience or an educational supplement? Even if the theatrical forms are undiluted, schools act in the role of the producer. (169)

TYA's work around social issues is not just about putting on plays for young people. Once artists assume roles as educators, the conditions of production and the efficacy of their work are influenced by the need to tailor material to specific age groups, the degree of involvement they choose or are allowed to have with students (participation versus performance), and the role played by larger structures, such as school boards that purchase the shows. As a result, it is important to distinguish TYA from theatre for adult audiences and to assess it accordingly.

Catalyst Theatre and The Company of Sirens/S.I.S.: Some Background

Catalyst and the Sirens are professional companies with histories of using theatre to tackle problems related to gender, race, and health, often commissioned by government and community agencies. They were both established, and worked for many years, as companies producing plays for adult audiences, gearing only some of their work to young audiences. Catalyst Theatre formed in 1977 in Edmonton with a mandate to "promote and practice theatre for public education and as a catalyst for social action" (Carlson 13). The company has undergone significant changes in structure and personnel over the years, but is still commit-

ted to "work[ing] in solidarity with a broad range of sectors on women's issues, the environment, economic justice, peace and disarmament, and native issues."[2] The Company of Sirens, a Toronto-based feminist theatre group, formed in 1985. It too has a long-standing reputation for producing popular plays around problems such as racism, wife assault, and women in the workplace. While the Sirens have created a range of work, they place a great deal of importance on their role as "educators for change."[3]

Given their commitment to promoting social change, it is not surprising that these companies eventually turned their attention to young audiences. In both cases, the TYA activity grew out of projects for adult audiences. Catalyst's work in TYA began in indirect ways in the early 1980s when the group was funded by AADAC (Alberta Alcoholism and Drug Addiction Commission) with shows like *Talk is Cheap* (1983) geared to teens and parents. They took a more active role in TYA when they produced *Feeling Yes, Feeling No* between 1985 and 1990 (a child sexual abuse prevention program for elementary school children first developed in 1982 by Green Thumb Theatre in Vancouver) and *Mind Your Own Body* between 1988 and 1990 (written by Sharon Stearns for junior highs). After piloting the play twice, Catalyst cancelled the tour of *Mind Your Own Body* because the company believed the program was not fulfilling its objectives. Catalyst has not produced plays exclusively for young audiences in schools since. The Sirens were involved in minor ways with school touring in the 1980s when they produced *All the Way (to Equality!)* (1988/89), by Lina Chartrand, specifically for high-school audiences, and offered performances of adult shows, *The Working People's Picture Show* (1985) and *Shelter From Assault* (1989), in schools. *Whenever I Feel Afraid* (1990), however, proved to be a turning point. Their performances in schools were so well received and supported that they expanded this branch of their work and created a separate TYA company in 1991 (S.I.S. Theatre Action in Education). I would like to take a closer look at these two productions — *Mind Your Own Body* and *Whenever I Feel Afraid* — and the circumstances surrounding their development and tours in order to assess why one group withdrew from TYA, while the other became more heavily involved.

Case One: *Mind Your Own Body*

Because of its sensitive subject matter, *Mind Your Own Body* proved to be an exercise in compromise for Catalyst, a theatre company accustomed to artistic autonomy in dealing with controversial social issues. The project was modelled on *Feeling Yes, Feeling No*, and was designed as a personal safety program for adolescents. As the term "program" implies, the visits to schools involved more than the performance of the play; it became the central part of a larger context of educational work with teens and adults (teachers and parents). According to Marie Carlson, who conducted the external evaluation, the "M.Y.O.B. program goals were identified during an initial six month period of extensive research which involved a literature search, interviews with adolescents, and consultation with educators and a variety of professionals working in child sexual abuse treatment/prevention" (16).[4] The play and the curriculum support materials were developed out of this research. Catalyst required school board approval before the play could be performed in schools, and script development was

overseen by consultants assigned to them by the board. At times there were as many as twenty people (consultants and representatives) in the rehearsal room during a reading. The company determined the creative process, but allowed people to respond to the material. As a result, some elements were declared unacceptable before the show ever reached its intended audience. Given the topic of sexual abuse, working in schools imposed severe restrictions on the content of the play, particularly in the province of Alberta where parental consent was required for student participation in the human sexuality component of health classes, as well as for seeing the play.

This created serious problems for the company because their preference was to deal with the issue of sexuality in a more complex way, by starting from the assumption that healthy, positive sexual relations between teens are possible. The play was supposed to be about the continuum of human relationships (from good to bad) and former artistic director, Ruth Smillie, admitted that in a theatre space it could have been a piece about teens and sex.[5] While the company was encouraged to talk about abuse, it was not allowed to talk about positive aspects of relationships (particularly as they pertained to gay and lesbian relationships). Consequently, the play's potential to engage and challenge students was diluted in the interest of making it acceptable to administrators. *Mind Your Own Body* is a series of self-contained scenes, using elements characteristic of Catalyst shows at the time, such as music, songs, factual information, and participatory segments. The importance of "asserting oneself" is the main theme linking the episodes. The title suggests a focus on personal safety in terms of physical/sexual contact, but the play in fact links "mind" and "body" by showing that assertiveness in everyday situations involving peers is connected to behaviour a young person must learn in order to protect him/herself in more threatening encounters. The play develops from scenes involving the responsibilities of baby-sitting, cheating on class tests, and shoplifting, to scenes depicting forms of sexual harassment and abuse by adults. On a thematic level, the gradual shift in the seriousness and sensitivity of the scenes is a deliberate way of forcing connections. On a practical level, because the show involves participation on the part of the audience, it also serves to establish a safe and comfortable environment for teenagers to respond to potentially threatening and embarrassing situations, by building up to them gradually.

Participation is a much debated feature in TYA and raises some important problems in the case of *Mind Your Own Body*, where it proved to be limiting in this particular institutional setting. Not all of the scenes in *Mind Your Own Body* involve participation. In some, the resolution to the particular dilemma is communicated through a closing monologue. In the participatory sequences, the action stops at a point of crisis and an Animator (either in or out of character) appeals to the audience for suggestions. The script outlines a variety of options that might arise and be explored and the performers play out the possibilities. According to Smillie, participation can be a valuable tool because it provides a safe opportunity for children to try out ideas and assertive behaviour. This is crucial in a program that tries to teach children how to assert themselves in intimidating or threatening situations, but these segments are contrived. Each time it is clear there are "right" and "wrong" approaches to the situation. On one hand, as Smillie explained, certain things don't work and the play tries to

demonstrate that. For example, in the "Bedroom Scene," the younger Sarah is not going to get rid of older Marty just because she asks him to leave her room. On the other hand, the form becomes manipulative if there are predetermined answers to the questions — the participatory segments are not about exploring the audience's input to the fullest, but about getting to the "right" behaviour quickly and demonstrating it.[6] The risk is that the audience realizes it will be shown the correct solution and ceases to participate in a serious way. Smillie agreed that, even though open-ended participation is the goal, it is difficult to create.[7] An additional problem with this kind of participation is that it places the responsibility for preventing or stopping the abuse on the potential victim, and thus minimizes the play's ability to examine larger structural factors and solutions.

The sensitive subject matter and the need to teach clearly defined objectives identified in the research make the use of participation in *Mind Your Own Body* problematic and limit the possible scope of the play. In addition, the restrictive atmosphere of the schools made it difficult for the company to respond to student interventions adequately, particularly when they touched on issues of sexual orientation.[8] While participation is generally regarded as a desirable and preferred element in educational theatre, what this case demonstrates is that its suitability and effectiveness can vary, given the restrictions and conditions imposed on specific productions and institutional settings.

In 1990 Catalyst cancelled the show in spite of a generally positive response from schools and a waiting list for the program. According to Smillie, the decision was based on what Catalyst believed was a failure on the part of *Mind Your Own Body* to meet some specific teaching objectives, in addition to problems related to the larger program. The evidence came from an independent evaluation of *Mind Your Own Body*, commissioned by the company, involving extensive surveys and interviews with students, teachers, and parents in three junior high schools participating in the program.[9] The evaluation's overall conclusion was positive, claiming that "M.Y.O.B. adequately meets the minimum standards for preventive CSA [child sexual abuse] programs" and "improves students' awareness of sexual abuse and its prevention and appears to enhance the interpersonal skills necessary for appropriately responding to individuals and risk situations, and in seeking help" (Carlson 77). But the report also identified a number of problems, including the fact that the program did not adequately address "healthy aspects/expressions of human sexuality to counteract [the] dominant negative messages" (72) and that the focus on the individual/victim and prevention did not allow for a more detailed examination of social and cultural factors contributing to these situations — an approach which would have been more in keeping with Catalyst's social action mandate. Regarding Catalyst's reasons for cancelling the program, Carlson claims: "My strong sense is that by opening up the opportunity for skepticism/self criticism, the evaluation process sufficiently reaffirmed Catalyst's primary committments [sic] and at the same time demonstrated the shortfall between the organization's larger structural and critical philosophy and practices and the individualistic approach of the M.Y.O.B. program" (80).

Smillie, however, referred to other and more specific reasons for cancelling the program. Firstly, as part of the evaluation process, students were

surveyed before and after the program in order to gauge its effectiveness in changing their understanding and attitudes towards the issues. The tests were distributed and results tabulated according to gender, asking, in some cases, specific questions of boys and girls. Smillie was not satisfied with the results, claiming that they did not indicate a significant enough change in the boys' responses to particular questions to justify continuing with the program.[10] The evaluation asserts that *Mind Your Own Body* appears to *add to*, rather than *change*, students' overall knowledge and awareness of sexual abuse and its prevention" (my emphasis) (59) and describes the program goals for students as "ambitious" (62).

Secondly, Smillie had serious concerns about the way teachers/administrators and parents were handling their part of the program. The company observed a shift in attitudes about child sexual abuse from a social issue involving people at all levels to a child's problem to be addressed by the education system. Indications of this shift could be seen in the turn-out at parents' meetings (a required component of the program) which dropped from 95% at the beginning to about 10% and less later on. An orientation to the program and to the possibility of child disclosures for all school staff was contractually required. Smillie claimed that by 1990, no one was coming to these orientation sessions and the schools were asking that they keep the meetings to ten minutes. There was even some evidence to suggest that disclosures were not being handled properly.

The decision to pull the program was a costly one for the company. *Feeling Yes, Feeling No* and *Mind Your Own Body* had been very lucrative for Catalyst and having to cancel bookings for a long waiting list of schools was bad public relations. *Mind Your Own Body* marked the end of Catalyst's involvement in school-based touring and Smillie insisted that any further TYA would be in the area of public performance works where they could deal with issues in less restrictive ways. It was not until 1995 that the company ventured back into the area of teen sexuality when they produced *Quake* as part of The Young and Edgy Project, sponsored in part by Health Canada, designed to give teen participants the skills/training and opportunity to create their own theatre pieces around issues such as sex, sexuality, relationships, and AIDS. As an approach, it represents a significant departure from the earlier projects and points to an interest in giving teens the tools to create and perform for their peers, outside of educational institutions.

The Catalyst case is instructive for a number of reasons. As an example of school-based TYA, *Mind Your Own Body* is more closely linked to theatre-in-education models in its emphasis on small group, intensive, participatory learning through theatre. This model possesses what is perhaps the greatest potential in pedagogical terms, but it relies on the involvement, co-operation, support, and approval of individuals and structures external to the actual site of performance/teaching. It also raises crucial questions about the goals and evaluation of TYA work, specifically whether it is realistic to expect to "change" attitudes, and what the appropriate methods of measuring the impact of a particular play/program are.[11] It seems that Catalyst took the issue of efficacy so seriously that they pulled out when their objectives were not being realized. The failure to meet objectives was a real and serious reason for cancelling the tour, along with other problems

surrounding the program. But their opting out of TYA, instead of pursuing different approaches, highlights the fact that the restrictive conditions of working in schools in the province of Alberta also played a vital role.

Case Two: *Whenever I Feel Afraid*

Through *Shelter From Assault*, a play about wife assault, the Sirens had gained a strong reputation with the Ontario Women's Directorate and government ministries for dealing with women's issues. The play was created for adults, but it had been performed in schools. When they decided to develop a show specifically for high school students, they worked with the full endorsement of representatives of the Ministry of Education and community organizations such as the London Family Court Clinic and women's shelters. *Whenever I Feel Afraid*, written by Cynthia Grant and Susan Seagrove, grew out of student feedback to *Shelter From Assault*; it had input from specialists in the field of domestic violence, and it followed the company's own set of guiding principles and objectives for the material.

The result was a show characteristic of the Sirens' adult pieces, using a presentational format (performed for the audience with no participation) and an episodic structure. The main components include realist as well as satiric sketches, monologues, and factual information. The scenes are held together by a narrative about a brother and sister with a history of family violence and strategic use of songs and images from popular culture.

The company's objectives and its experience of dealing with the issue of domestic violence shaped the content of the play. One concern (relevant to all their work) was to expose the socio-cultural roots of the violence. The presentational format, the use of stylized/non-realist elements, and the flexible structure of the play grow out of the need to make broader connections. Artistic director, Cynthia Grant, notes the difficulty of trying to examine socio-cultural factors within the confines of the single plot: "the danger is, if you focus it on an individual set of circumstances, people won't see it ... they won't get that what you are trying to say is that it happens because of larger societal conditions."[12] The use of realistic scenes to facilitate participation limited Catalyst's ability to make these larger, more abstract connections. The Sirens were also concerned to create a set of characters who would offer a range of types and they consulted literature and experts dealing with the children of battered women in developing these aspects of the show. While they were careful to present an appropriate and realistic range of characters and situations, the play never actually shows the violence. Grant explained: "one of our guiding principles is that we don't show women being hit on stage. That kind of imagery has been used so much within entertainment (a sensationalized, eroticized experience with the audience) and we don't want to perpetuate that. Another reason is that it can just inure people to seeing that violence, so our monologues describe the violence, and we stylize it."

The Sirens, compared to Catalyst, worked with relative freedom in creating the play; no one was assigned to supervise the process. Because the play previewed for the Ministry of Education, including top representatives on the issue of family violence, they went into schools under the auspices of senior

planners in the field, so the play was not vetted by school boards. They did take comments and feedback seriously, but were not required to do more than change a few lines. It should be noted that this has not always been the case; TYA shows in Ontario are generally viewed by school board representatives before they are booked and these preview performances, in addition to being costly for small companies, can make or break the demand for the production. Objections or requests for changes can range from relatively minor points (like deleting offensive words) to more serious conflicts over the suitability of themes, or, as in the recent case concerning Young People's Theatre, casting decisions. Seagrove explained that S.I.S. has had few conflicts with board members or teachers over such matters, and has been willing to compromise on minor points of language, for the sake of getting information out to teenagers. But school board approval is something all these companies consider when they are developing their shows.

In order to examine the continuum of violence and gender more generally, *Whenever I Feel Afraid* shifts from scenes in the school yard, to a parody of television commercials, a fantasy encounter between two John Claude Van "Damns" and three Barbies, monologues expressing internal states of mind, and disturbing family scenes. Each scene is designed to explore a problem related to family violence — the impact of wife assault on children, how violent behaviours are reproduced, the impact of gender stereotypes in the media on self-image and relationships — thus encouraging young people to make connections between different aspects of their lives. In fifty minutes, the performers are able to cover a range of related issues and evoke a range of responses, from laughter, to tension and fear. The presentational format gives the performers control over the content, pace, and tone of the overall piece, in a way that is not possible in participatory work where the overall effects can be unpredictable and depend on the given audience. This format can also cover more material, since participation takes time and limits the number of scenes or situations a group can explore.

Along with the presentational format, what distinguished this project from *Mind Your Own Body* was that it is was not part of a larger (required) program of learning activities. In many cases, the company performed the show as a "one-off," sometimes for the whole school during the lunch hour break. The Sirens included a question and answer period after the performance and provided teachers with a discussion guide. Ideally, they would have ensured that the issues raised by the play could be explored in pre- and post-performance sessions, but requests for more staffing were turned down because the ministry had already launched several initiatives and supplied the boards with resource material for these purposes. Most schools were prepared for the event with counsellors and consultants on hand to do follow-up work and only in the case of junior high audiences did the company insist that students be prepared for the show. The company occasionally conducts workshops in schools and Grant's belief is that good workshops are the best thing they can be doing in this kind of education around gender issues because interactive, participatory exercises in small group situations are where you can get students to talk about their values, challenge them, and explore detailed aspects of problems. But because they knew they would be performing in auditoriums for large groups, they did not expect to involve the audience. As Susan Seagrove noted, an audience of 750 is not ideal

even for a production like *Whenever I Feel Afraid*, but that show has a much better chance of making an impact than a participational show.

There was no formal assessment of the production, but reviews and letters indicated responses from different groups. The endorsements of educators and experts in the field of family violence were significant because they indicated how much more effective the play was in generating concern and debate amongst students than were more conventional approaches such as information sessions. Students' letters revealed some of their reactions to particular features of the play. Many letters (in both the junior high and high-school groups) stressed the importance of dealing with these serious issues because they do not always get talked about. Some commented on how powerful the use of statistics in the play had been and how important it was that the play pointed to organizations and people who can assist in these situations — the very features of issue-based shows often regarded as too overtly didactic for 'art.' To the credit of the actors and the script itself, many were struck by the authenticity of the performances and scenarios and felt that the actors understood and cared about the issues they were dealing with. Some of the most moving letters came from students who had experienced family violence and they praised the quality of the play, stressing the need for such productions. *Whenever I Feel Afraid* had managed to relate to and communicate with these students and to evoke serious and thoughtful responses. Whether or not it would have withstood the rigorous evaluation process Catalyst subjected their play to is difficult to assess, but the letters indicated it was reaching at least some of its audience.

Over the last six years, S.I.S. Theatre Action in Education has become an important presence in TYA and has toured to schools across Ontario, mainly outside Toronto. The company is part of the Theatre for Young Audiences Association which, according to Susan Seagrove, is doing advocacy work to raise the profile of TYA. The next production S.I.S. mounted was *Datelines* (1994), a collectively devised piece about date/acquaintance sexual assault. This play included material on sexual orientation and the problem of homophobia in high schools. Grant explained that the importance of introducing students to issues around gay and lesbian identity is coming up frequently for them. Although they expected to have problems with some school boards, they were not required to make cuts. But Grant believes that homophobia will prove to be a difficult issue to tackle with students as well as administrators. Other new directions have included *Singing Between the Lines* (1995) by Shakura S'Aida, with Quammie Williams, which traces Canadian Black History through musical forms, and *Media Madness* (1996), a multi-media performance/installation which explores the influence of media on young people's lives.

The Sirens and Catalyst demonstrate the critical nature of the goals, forms, and conditions of production of TYA work. Practitioners have to make choices about the objectives they set for themselves, and adjust their expectations according to the means and time available to them. But this is difficult to do. Much of the impetus — at least for issue-based work — comes from a commitment to changing attitudes and giving children and teens the tools they need to confront problems on personal and larger social/political levels. While most practitioners prefer to work with small groups in an interactive way, this does not always prove

to be an ideal approach. In the context of British TIE, Tony Jackson outlines the debates concerning participation and the loss of confidence in it as a method:

> Many TIE actors with a conventional theatre training have felt that participation work was better handled by teachers, others have found it simply exhausting, while others still became frustrated by activating children towards decisions and understandings about the need for change in society only then to walk away, leaving them in the hands of the institution, resulting in little or no change. Surely, it was argued, actors should play their strengths: could not theatre be powerful through performance alone, through sharper imagery and more controlled, resonant narrative... If you have to walk away, better to leave children with the memory of a powerful theatre performance that might continue to work, beneath the surface. (27)

Jackson's summary reinforces the fact that after many years of work, practitioners are still debating the efficacy of participatory versus performance forms. What is clear is that the decision to do intensive, participatory programs or performance-based shows determines the degree of involvement a company will have with the figures/bodies (teachers, parents, and bureaucrats) who mediate between them and their target audiences. In turn, the nature of this involvement is shaped by the extent to which the values and priorities of the artists are shared by those who position themselves as guardians of the young. At its best, the relationship is one of collaboration, at worst, a political battle.

The Challenges and Rewards of TYA

The same features expected of adult shows — strong writing, performances, and design — are crucial to the success of TYA productions. At the same time, this work can be an effective teaching tool, particularly when it is part of a larger context of discussion and activities related to social issues. By taking the shows to the schools, companies can reach larger numbers of young people and a greater cross section in terms of socio-economic groups than any play in a theatre space. But the process and the touring can be gruelling for theatre groups. It is particularly demanding on casts who are not only required to perform, but also to learn about the issues and be prepared to respond to questions, even at times disclosures. The stresses of the work are intensified, as in the case of Catalyst, by the restrictions of a morally conservative milieu, or school authorities who prefer to avoid controversy. The difference between Catalyst's and the Sirens' experiences of working with school boards is a good example of the discrepancies between provincial education policies in Canada. Wayne Fairhead explains:

> There is no national curriculum. As a result, the position of the arts varies according to the agenda of the provincial political party in power at the time. For drama educators this is a tricky business; for professional theatre companies who specialize in work for children and youth, it is a constant concern. (151)

Occasionally, these companies also face hostility from the community. Smillie offered the example of one parent, a lawyer who campaigned between 1985 and 1990 to shut down both *Feeling Yes, Feeling No* and *Mind Your Own Body* because he believed they gave misleading impressions of fatherly affections. He had not seen either show, but received air time for his views. Social issues are by their very

nature divisive, and it is inevitable that this kind of work will generate controversy as it challenges people at different levels of authority.

This situation is compounded by the long term economic threats to this work. Arts funding is shrinking across Canada and the attempt to restructure granting bodies often means that specialized areas no longer receive separate consideration. The Ontario Arts Council has recently eliminated its Arts Education Office, so TYA groups will compete with other forms of theatre for program and project grants. Contributing to this funding crisis, the recent assault on educational funding in Ontario makes the prospects for TYA bleak. As education budgets shrink, less money is available to pay professional companies to perform in schools. Britain has seen a trend towards performance-only work (a shift away from participatory TIE programs) as arts and education funding has decreased (Jackson 26). Participation-based productions are more labour intensive, and hence more expensive for schools. But even performance-only shows are often geared to specific age groups, limiting their potential audience. S.I.S. has seen a significant drop in requests for its shows, due simply to budgetary cut backs. Some of the departments and organizations that booked and even commissioned its work in the past have now disappeared altogether. And TYA is in a disadvantageous position to seek other, private forms of funding. As Dennis Foon notes: "Corporate sponsors are reticent to fund a form of theatre that has such a low profile — and an audience that does not control the purse strings" (261).

TYA in particular, and issue-based theatre in general, also face the less tangible obstacle of a dubious status in the larger theatre community, where the pedagogical and advocacy aspects of the work — the very features that make it so important in the wider community — are considered to be antithetical to "art." In the specific case of TYA, this is complicated by the fact that the status of the artist is based on the status of the audience. Foon argues that the stigma attached to the genre has a direct impact on the practitioners — "artists who work for children are held in low esteem" (253). Similarly, Shirley Barrie, explains: "historically, it has been difficult to achieve credibility for the work or to create a sense of community among the producers . . . Theatre for Young Audiences too often has been dismissed as something you do until you manage to get something 'better'" (6). There are practical reasons for TYA's low profile as well, as Barrie reminds us, "Plays for young audiences are likely to `open' at 9:15 a.m. at a suburban school off the subway line. Time and place mitigate against attracting an audience of peers" (6). Consequently, these productions are seldom reviewed and, because issue-based plays are usually devised by the companies, it is rare for them to be published (unlike the work of professional playwrights like Dennis Foon). These factors have and will continue to affect the kind of funding TYA can generate.

On the other hand, for companies like S.I.S., the rewards of the work are great. Cynthia Grant explains: "I feel really good about doing this material with the shelter movement and educators who actually know the issues ... we come at this as people who have been involved in the women's movement and that has really made a difference to what kind of product we will produce ... this is not just us capitalizing on an issue, it is an issue we care about and have looked at for several years before we embarked on dealing with it for teenagers." The respect

and support they have earned from community organizations, educators, and especially young audiences confirm their accomplishments. Seagrove sees this kind of work as central to making theatre *part* of the community, by taking it into schools and social service organizations. But while they struggle to make young people think about social issues in new ways, they are also struggling to get the "adult" world — bureaucrats, politicians, parents, and other theatre practitioners — to recognize the artistic and pedagogical value of their work. The survival of TYA depends on it.

(The author would like to thank Susan Seagrove, Cynthia Grant, Ruth Smillie, Jane Heather, Catherine Graham, and Graham Knight for discussing these issues and productions and for making necessary materials available.)

Notes

1. It should be noted that Young People's Theatre in Toronto fits into this category and differs from the other companies discussed in the paper. YPT is unusual in that it has its own space and audiences go *to* it; the other companies produce shows and rely on touring them.
2. For accounts of Catalyst Theatre's earlier work, see "Catalyst: A Theatre of Commitment" by Vivian Bosley (*Canadian Theatre Review* 27, 1980), and *Collective Encounters* (1987) by Alan Filewod. For more recent accounts, see "Making Change: Administering Socially-Committed Theatre at Catalyst" by David Burgess (*Theatrum* April/May 1990) and "Women's Circle: Women's Theatre" by Jane Heather, et al (*Canadian Theatre Review* 69, 1991).
3. For further accounts of the Sirens' work, see "Ballrooms and Boardroom Tables" by Amanda Hale (*CTR* 53, 1987), "The Company of Sirens: Popular Feminist Theatre in Canada" by Kym Bird (*CTR* 59, 1989), "Women, Popular Theatre, and Social Action: Interviews with Cynthia Grant and the Sistren Theatre Collective" by Maria DiCenzo and Susan Bennett (*Ariel* 23:1, 1992) and "Penelope" by Cynthia Grant, Susan Seagrove with Peggy Sample (*CTR* 78, 1994).
4. Carlson notes that M.Y.O.B. grew out of community requests and that it "operate[d] under the jurisdiction of the Canadian Actor's Equity Association, and [was] funded by Health and Welfare Canada, the Muttart Foundation, and Edmonton Social Services" (16).
5. My references to Ruth Smillie are based on a series of personal interviews I conducted with her in May 1993 and April/May 1994.
6. Alan Filewod considers the manipulative potential of participational forms in the context of Catalyst's work with adult audiences (see *Collective Encounters: Documentary Theatre in English Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987).
7. An earlier Catalyst production, *Zeke and the Indoor Plants* (1986), was more successful in using the same format to generate open-ended participation, but the play deals with learning skills and responsibilities — not harassment and abuse — so the stakes are not as high. The script for *Zeke and the Indoor Plants* can be found in *Canadian Theatre Review* 60/Fall 1989.
8. The most disturbing example was the "Music Teacher Scene" where the teacher, Mr. Eliot, begins to touch his young male student, Jesse, in inappropriate and unwanted ways, during the lesson. Smillie explained that there were occasions when children screamed "kill the fag" and the company members felt they could not respond appropriately (particularly in a province where protection under the Individual Rights Protection Act does not extend to homosexuals). She did not regard it as entirely the schools' fault, because they too were so severely restricted in terms of what they could discuss. Carlson's evaluation identifies this scene as the most controversial in the play and finds it "was largely misinterpreted by

students as demonstrating a connection between sexual preference and sexual assault, rather than as an abuse of power and authority within relationships which was the scene's actual intent" and concludes that "Students' responses to this scene reflect the strong homophobic bias in society in general" (57).

9. The evaluation is in the form of a 118 page Master's thesis, by Marie S. Carlson, for the Department of Sociology, University of Alberta, 1989. A detailed discussion of the process of assessment and the findings is beyond the scope of this paper.

10. The questions vary, like the scenes in the play, from common peer pressure situations to questions concerning forms of sexual assault. The students answer using a five-point scale (ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"). I believe Smillie was referring to a series of seven questions about sexual assault. Two examples of the questions asked of boys in this section are: (16) if a girl/woman says 'no' it means a guy should keep trying, and (18) it's alright to expect sex from a girl/woman if a guy is so turned on he thinks he can't stop. I should note that there are parallel questions directed at girls. She must have believed that it was realistic to expect that the program could change their attitudes.

11. In "Evaluating TIE" Ken Robinson argues that the "objectives model," common in this field, is not necessarily the most appropriate model. He points out that while a program may not seem to achieve its stated objectives, it may possibly have effects that were not anticipated. He also notes the problem of measuring short-term versus long-term effects, arguing that effects may not always be apparent in the short term.

12. All references to Cynthia Grant and Susan Seagrove are based on personal interviews I conducted with them in April and May 1994.

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A Conversation With Sara Lee Lewis: Celebrating Nova Scotia's Mermaid Theatre

• *Hilary Thompson* •

Résumé: *Dans cette entrevue accordée en novembre 1996, Hilary Thompson et Sara Lee Lewis font le bilan des vingt-cinq années d'activité de leur compagnie, le Mermaid Theatre de la Nouvelle-Écosse. Cette troupe a, d'une part, toujours favorisé la créativité chez les jeunes à l'échelle locale et, d'autre part, oeuvré à l'établissement et à la diffusion d'un répertoire de théâtre canadien pour la jeunesse.*

Summary: *In this retrospective interview which took place in November 1996, Hilary Thompson and Sara Lee Lewis, Managing Director and Co-Founder of Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia, discuss the company's history and mandate, as well as issues such as funding, repertory, and the controversial question of cultural appropriation. Now in its twenty-fifth season, Mermaid Theatre makes its home in Windsor, at the gateway to Nova Scotia's rural Annapolis Valley. The Theatre's focus is two-fold. On the one hand, Mermaid's activist and outspoken Youtheatre program is intensely local, having as its objective the encouragement of creative self-expression among the region's adolescents. At the other end of the spectrum is the Theatre's energetic touring theatre for family audiences, which has won international acclaim for original multimedia productions with a strong emphasis on puppetry.*

Mermaid's choice of material is based on the belief that young people can benefit substantially, both in their emotional and aesthetic development, from early exposure to literature, the arts, and the power of imagination. The Theatre commissions new scripts as well as draws upon the rich motherlode of children's stories with universal appeal. These are either contemporary Canadian (Dennis Foon, Ellen Bryan Obed, Sheree Fitch, Margaret Atwood and Joyce Barkhouse, for example), classics from an earlier generation (such as Munro Leaf and E.B. White), or traditional (Puss in Boots). Mermaid is best known for its unusual mix of striking visual images, evocative original music, scripts whose language is moderately demanding, and puppets and staging which draw young spectators into a world of fantasy. The company aims to produce work which is good theatre — entertaining, informative and stimulating to all the senses. As important is the goal of encouraging literacy and generating enthusiasm for the art of reading.

Mermaid Theatre's touring productions at home and abroad serve as a continuous showcase for East Coast performing artists, writers, directors, designers and technicians. The Theatre ranks among Atlantic Canada's foremost cultural employers.

The early days ...
(left to right) Evelyn Garbary, Sara Lee Lewis and Tom Miller, co-founders of Mermaid Theatre, at work in the early '70s. (archival photo)

Hilary Thompson: *You must be in a reflective mood as you anticipate the Mermaid Theatre's anniversary celebrations for 1997. Can you look back and give us an overview of your role since 1972?*

Sara Lee Lewis: Yes, it is a reflective time. My role within the company has changed over the last 25 years. From Mermaid's inception until 1991, my formal role was administrative. I began as Administrator during the years when Evelyn Garbary [Director of Drama at Acadia from 1967 to 1976] was Artistic Director and then I was General Manager during Graham Whitehead's tenure (1982-1991). I then approached our Board of Directors with the idea of combining the administrative and artistic senior roles — instead of having an Artistic Director and a General Manager, I proposed that we have one person — a Managing Director. In that position, I could weigh and balance artistic and financial matters and make decisions with the help of artistic associates. I think, in the future, once I retire, the theatre will probably go back to a more traditional structure, a structure that is typical of other theatres. But, in the meantime, I'm very happy working the way I do. Ironically, the company is much more artist driven than it's ever been because the active participation of my artistic associates is very full. I work with Jim Morrow who has come a long way since he first joined Mermaid as one of Evelyn's students nearly twenty years ago. He was about twenty then;

now he's forty and has four children and has been involved in all aspects of the company's work as Associate Director/Associate Designer.

Thompson: *Jim's puppets and design work, like that of Tom Miller before him, are an important aspect of Mermaid's theatrical style and tradition. I believe Mermaid's role in the community has developed as well.*

Lewis: Yes. We also work closely with Chris Heide, the Associate Director for youth theatre. Chris runs the non-professional wing of our company and administers our youth outreach program which has been quite influential in showing young people, especially adolescents, the role that theatre arts can play in helping them explore creative self-expression, and also in solving problems in their lives. They write for theatre, and at the same time they talk about what's close to them. Chris has become an important mentor for young writers in the province. We held a major competition last year called "Growing Up in Nova Scotia," and we had two hundred very good submissions. The entries were serious work: stories, poems, songs, short stories. They were touching; they were funny; they were outspoken; they were outrageous and very, very close to the subject matter that interests young people. Then Chris animated some of the stories, with the help of a team of young writers — the Summer New Play Collective — and took the works back to the high schools. In other words, we had young people writing for young people and then performing for young people. We hope to continue those programs. As well, Chris and his group took some of the work to Scotland.

Thompson: *I'd like to talk more about the Summer New Play Collective in relation to subject matter for scripts. With your interest in children's theatre reaching a wide audience, I believe you were associated with the organization ASSITEJ [Association Internationale de Theatre pour la Jeunesse]?*

Lewis: Yes, I was. In the early days when there was an ASSITEJ Canada, I was Chair of the Canadian Centre for four years.

Thompson: *You have brought much experience and know-how to Mermaid Theatre. How did the national position affect the provincial situation?*

Lewis: After that I was involved with UNIMA [Union Internationale de la Marionette/The International Association of Puppeteers]. Sadly, ASSITEJ is no longer active in Canada. I enjoyed it when it was truly a national organization and the French language theatre companies were part of the organization, but with funding cuts some years ago we lost our Executive Director and the ability to do translations. As a result, Quebec kept its own ASSITEJ and the Canadian English-speaking organization is no more. It exists formally, but it is inactive. The same thing has happened with UNIMA, so that sadly we belong to UNIMA USA and remain in touch that way with the international scene. I have become reflective because I realize I'm one of the senior arts administrators in the province now and I look back with some good feelings because I see that times are getting better. Ironically, Nova Scotia is becoming a have-province in the sense that the arts are vital and that funding, at least for the moment, has not been cut. There are glimmers of excitement with the creation of a new Arts Council and a Premier who boldly states, "I will not tax books." And so there are signs of effervescence in the province, I think, especially as the arts scene in the rest of Canada is troubled.

The Curious Crew prepare for adventure, in Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia's production of ***Borrowed Black, a Labrador Fantasy****. (Photo by Nat Tileston)*

Thompson: *Is it not true that part of Mermaid Theatre's original mandate in the '70s was to increase awareness of puppetry in the Maritimes?*

Lewis: That mandate remains, although we haven't run the International Puppet Festival the way we did from 1974-1980 because the generous grant money we got from the Province is no longer available, and because Mermaid's schedule is so full. We do, however, offer workshops and master classes at all levels.

Thompson: *Are there any other puppet companies in the Maritimes?*

Lewis: There's the Maritime Marionettes in Truro, NS, and a new company in New Brunswick. It's very reassuring to know we have people working at Mermaid now who are second generation puppetry artists. Jim Morrow came to Mermaid as a student. Alice Green-Lund first learned of Mermaid when she saw performances of *Just So Stories* in her high school in Grand Falls. Now, as Production Manager, she is refitting the same production, which we are taking on the road for our twenty-fifth anniversary. Her son of three years knows the words to many of our scripts. We frequently have third generation youngsters and third generation Mermaid fans in our audiences now and that's very, very rewarding. We have had several students who came to Mermaid for puppet workshops as youngsters, participated in our Youth Theatre, studied theatre at Dalhousie or Acadia and have then have come back to work at Mermaid as apprentices in the

summer! Ultimately, some of them will become full-time professional performers.

Thompson: *We have talked about Mermaid's work in Nova Scotia and Atlantic Canada, but I know you've had a national and international profile as well.*

Lewis: We consider ourselves a local company, a regional, a national and an international company. Yet it remains as important to us to play to the children in Gaspereau or Windsor Forks Elementary as it is to play in Washington.

Thompson: *Do you tour across Canada?*

Yes we do, although the frequency depends on funding. Our presenters are not only schools and theatres. There are Fine Arts programs for families at universities as well. For example, York, Brock, and the University of Waterloo have in the past had fine arts series for families in which we participated, although many of these programs have now been reduced. So every time there is a cut either to the arts or education, whether it's in Toronto or Halifax County, it affects us. We're certainly beginning to feel the effects in that our touring schedule is much diminished this year.

We see ourselves as cultural ambassadors for the Annapolis Valley, for Nova Scotia, and for Canada, and as such have been able to provide a remarkable showcase for Atlantic region talent. We celebrate the talents of artists within the region, but also help promote their work outside. We rarely work with performers from "away" — often we repatriate them.

Thompson: *I know when Evelyn Garbary began to direct theatre with children, first at Acadia and then with Mermaid, she was very concerned about the children becoming aware of their own legends from their own region — rooting themselves in the region. For this reason she directed a number of Mi'kmaq tales. Would you comment on how that concern is reflected in your work now?*

Lewis: The reason we moved away from that direction was external rather than internal. We are moving back slowly after a period of producing plays drawn from universal material — stories such as *Gulliver's Travels* and *Puss in Boots*. We are limited in our ability, for example, to do Mi'kmaq material because we are not First Nations people and the Canada Council, our major funding agency, has a policy concerning cultural appropriation. Yet during our first decade we introduced thousands of young people on several continents to this rich folklore. I am amused that the Canada Council is quite content that last year we produced Munro Leaf's story of *Wee Gillis* and we used Celtic folklore and Celtic music — also cultural appropriation but acceptable! In all of Nova Scotia an amazingly very small percentage of Nova Scotians actually have Celtic blood. I certainly don't — I'm Jewish. I'm determined in the near future that we'll do some Acadian stories.

I'm prepared to fight for this, if necessary, because I would like Mermaid to perform such material again. We are more interested than ever in renewing Evelyn's vision. We have made some inroads recently by producing a play from Labrador [Ellen Bryan Obed's *Borrowed Black*]. It does have some Inuit throat music in it, the images are very much of the north. It's done in black light, to project a feeling of snow and cold. In summary, the forces were external which moved us away from our earlier direction. Perhaps sensitivities have changed somewhat —

I hope they have — which will allow us to explore again our own rich body of regional literature.

Thompson: *Did you ever get hold of Murdena Marshall's story that she mentioned at the Raddall Symposium?*

Lewis: No, but that would be interesting.

Thompson: *Then you would be working with a Mi'kmaq writer who understands the use of stories to teach Mi'kmaq cultural beliefs.*

Lewis: We would like to do that. We are increasingly interested in celebrating our region and our roots, and in moving away from international material. The question of Canadian content is an interesting one. The criteria for Canada Council support have varied from discipline to discipline. For the purposes of Canadian content in broadcasting, the CBC considers that Symphony Nova Scotia's recording of Beethoven is legitimate. If Mermaid adapts the work of Munro Leaf, an American writer, using a Nova Scotian composer, a Nova Scotian director, Nova Scotian designers and artists with substantial royalties remaining in Nova Scotia, our projects may still be considered by the funding agencies as an American play. We disagree, of course. What makes something Nova Scotian? Is it the participants, is it the adapters, is it the sensibility, is it the approach? *I* think it's all of those things.

Let's turn to an example where we don't use an existing story, but invite leading children's writer Sheree Fitch to create a contemporary legend for us (Rummabubba, Lidmaker of the Snufflewogs). Then we have a made-up story, by a local author which has the elements of a universal fairytale. Will it qualify as Nova Scotian? We think so!

My feeling now is that we should just go forward and do the very best, most imaginative and most visionary work we can. The subject matter will vary — some plays will be drawn from legends, others from traditional or even contemporary material. The scope is considerable.

Thompson: *To come back to that other group you mentioned, the Summer New Play Collective. Will their work be considered by Mermaid?*

Lewis: We feel there is an immediacy born out of young people talking to young people. It is the non-professional wing of our company, but if the work is good enough, touring is an option. During 1995 Chris undertook an interesting international project, in which members of Theatre Workshop Edinburgh came to Nova Scotia and worked with our group in Windsor, NS. Together they created a play about misconceptions of one another's country. Then they all travelled to Edinburgh, where it played at the Fringe Festival and was relatively successful. They had an excellent time, of course, and got to know a lot about each other's country and about the potential power of theatre. Each summer we hire two or three young people as part of the Summer New Play Collective, people who come and shape the writings that have been submitted by Youtheatre members with a view to taking the finished product into the high schools. It's very exciting to watch their talent evolve.

Thompson: *So you feel that in the professional wing of Mermaid Theatre puppets are as important an ingredient as ever in your performances?*

Captain Cabbage and his crew prepare to rescue the moon in Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia's production of ***Borrowed Black, a Labrador Fantasy****. (Photo by Nat Tileston)*

Lewis: Yes, very much. The professional wing of the company is strongly committed to puppetry in some form. We use varied multi-media techniques. For example, in our recent production of *Borrowed Black*, there are strong elements of dance, and mime, original music and both black light and incandescent light. Although many of our shows feature live music, in this case, we have a stunning recorded soundscape. So the production elements go beyond puppetry. Although it's performed in black light, the puppeteers are often visible — we break rules. We are expanding horizons, I think. The use of masks and puppets has enabled us to portray both natural and supernatural worlds.

Thompson: *I always think that Mermaid Theatre blends human form and puppetry in an innovative way.*

Lewis: Certainly our blend of puppets and performers is the thing that makes us different. There are other companies across Canada, and certainly in the United States, who do conventional stage material and contemporary scripts very, very well. Our approach makes us somewhat unique. It's a challenge because our presenters and our audiences wonder what the next production's puppets will be like. They are never the same.

We enjoy collaboration with other companies: for example, *The Nut Cracker*, which had its sixth run in 1996, is a joint project with Halifax Dance and

Symphony Nova Scotia. Halifax Dance, which is a company of young performers, wanted to do *The Nut Cracker*, but they had no male dancers in their troupe. Accordingly, we introduced puppet characters into the ballet to fill those gaps. For example, the Cossack dancer is a puppet. The Spirit of Winter is an amazing twenty-two foot tall character.

One other thing I should mention about our mandate (to raise awareness of puppetry in the province) is that we work to ensure excellent standards of puppetry, both for adults and children.

We boast that Jim Morrow provides cradle-to-career training in puppetry. He teaches youngsters and their parents as well as professional artists. In addition to community workshops, he offers master classes at a number of university drama departments as well as at the National Theatre School in Montreal. It's very good for students who are studying theatre to broaden their horizons and understand the role that puppetry can play. It allows us to assess the potential of the students. As a result, over the last few years, we have hired many of Dalhousie University's theatre graduates as apprentices. Lately we have begun to offer residencies and workshops in conjunction with our touring productions, an interesting new development for us. As conventional funding for the arts dries up in the United States, some of our enterprising presenters have found money through educational sources for programs which combine performances and workshops. So our artists will be teaching as well.

Thompson: *Teaching teachers?*

Lewis: Teachers, students, professional performers — all in conjunction with our stay in an area. In March of 1997 we'll spend a week in Tacoma, Washington. In addition to the company's performances, Jim will give master classes and the company members will offer workshops. Some of them will be demonstration classes which provide an introduction to puppetry; others will be more serious and intensive sessions. The people attending will see the show, perceive what the medium can offer, and then take workshops to develop their own skills. We hope to present this program in British Columbia in 1997, as well, which will probably be a first for Canada. It's all in the interest of promoting puppetry, expanding our horizons, and acknowledging that we have very good teachers, and something special to share.

Thompson: *Apart from these changes, how would you say your audience has changed in the last twenty-five years?*

Lewis: We had a wonderful year of touring during 1995-96. Our budget was about three-quarters of a million dollars and we played in sixteen states, plus Washington, DC, and five provinces as well as all over Nova Scotia. This year, because of funding cutbacks both in Canada and United States, our presenters have less money and as a result we are not touring outside the region nearly as much. But the exciting thing is we are touring more in Nova Scotia, in New Brunswick, in Prince Edward Island, and in Newfoundland. So we're more visible closer to home, which is very rewarding spiritually, if not financially. It's not as lucrative as when we tour in the United States, where the venues are closer together and the fees are higher and in American dollars. Last season we were able to earn 75% of our revenues in the USA. Except for some gas and tolls, we bring

all that money back into the province, enabling us to underwrite our new work.

There are a variety of presenters. Some are school districts; for example, we play in Suffolk County, Long Island, at least twice a year. Sometimes there are theatres which have outreach programs; for example, Detroit's Youtheatre sponsors performances both in its theatre and in the Detroit area. In the Pittsburgh region a consortium of performing arts sponsors plans jointly for tours of two to three weeks. The mix varies. We have found that US presenters, especially those interested in children's theatre, are adept in finding corporate sponsors who appreciate theatre for the young. In Canada we have less and less federal subsidization, but the gap has not been filled with corporate donors, at least not in children's theatre.

Thompson: *Do you think that would change if we had really good children's theatre venues where corporations could see the performances?*

Lewis: I would say the Young People's Theatre in Toronto, which is the major site in Canada for children's theatre, faces the same problems as any adult theatre. They have the challenge of producing good work, which they certainly do, but also the added problem of keeping the physical plant running. All of us are competing with social services, and medical charities, and adult performing arts organizations. The numbers have increased a hundredfold and it's very difficult to say "No, no, no, don't support Cystic Fibrosis, support our theatre company," when obviously both are needed.

The only thing we can say to government, particularly in our region, is that they should not view subsidies to us as an outright grant, but rather as business incentive funding. The province gave us $77,800 last year; on the strength of that we brought into Nova Scotia almost $600,000 in either revenues or federal grants. So the return is much higher than most business start-up projects. Further, a large portion is spent on local goods and services. We're a sound investment.

Thompson: *What about the reaction of the children to your plays? Do they find them as fresh and as interesting as ever?*

Lewis: I frequently attend a school performance to gauge reaction. I am always full of trepidation because I look at these kids who in their hearts are full of wonderment, as children have always been, but I also know that they are sadly sophisticated and many of them are even sexually active. And here we are trying to amuse them, entertain them, stimulate them with fairy tale stories. Yet their response is very rewarding. They want to be children, they need to be children. We touch something in them even though their knowledge about the world is ten times that of children ten years ago. They need to be kids more than ever, so I come away reassured.

It's also important that the images we present are fresh and are not drawn from television. There are some wonderful things on television, and one hopes that with the introduction of more and more children's and youth channels that we'll have access to more interesting films and other possibilities. I'm not saying that these should not exist.

But children need to develop a vocabulary to discuss what they are seeing, and to appreciate the immediacy of live presentation. When Evelyn

Garbary first approached me about starting a company such as Mermaid, one of her motivations was the fact that many of her students had never seen professional theatre; others had never seen live theatre at all, except for Sunday School pageants. For some, the first plays they had ever seen were those presented in Evelyn's classes. Now that's changed a lot because many touring companies visit schools, not only with theatre, but with music and dance as well. Also important are the programs for writers and visual artists.

The other thing that's happened, especially in the Fall of 1996, is that we got an immediate response to our offering. Our Nova Scotia school tour is longer than usual despite the stringent economic situation in the schools. Somehow these schools are finding money. We have a wonderful network of supporters — classroom teachers, art teachers, music teachers, parents. As arts and drama and music programs are cut back, they seem to realize how very important it is that the gaps are filled. We're filling those gaps, more than ever.

This Fall, because of restructuring of school boards, and downsizing, there have been many staff changes. There are — or seem to be — more female administrators, more women principals, and I've noticed there's a greater sensitivity to the arts. It may be that they are not yet jaded about ways to find money; maybe it's because they are fresh in their new roles — but they are welcoming the possibility of our visit. That's been a surprising turn of events. And I think this is the same experience enjoyed by the other companies going into the schools. In addition to Nova Scotia's Young Neptune, which spends a brief period each year in the schools, companies come in from outside the region and play in Nova Scotia as well. Because we spend so much time in other provinces, I'm comfortable with the knowledge that our province is open to these groups and when asked we offer our help and expertise. It broadens the experience for all the kids.

Thompson: *What do you see yourself doing in the future?*

Lewis: I'd like to keep working with Mermaid in some capacity, if they'll have me. The work I most enjoy now is long-term planning with writers, composers and designers. I like sitting down with Sheree Fitch and Jim Morrow and saying "let's do a project together!" Sometimes it takes at least two to three years to develop something but the process is energizing. I eventually would like to give up some of my management duties. But I'd like to remain involved for as long as I can.

Thompson: *Do you feel comfortable about the future of Mermaid Theatre and children's theatre in particular in the Maritimes?*

Lewis: Yes I do. I believe in the future of Mermaid because there's continuity. I think the thing that works for us is that after twenty-five years there are still quite a number of us who were involved in the beginning in one way or another. For instance, Tom Miller, our co-founder, remains in close touch, and I'm delighted that he'll be receiving royalties when we do the *Just So Stories* again in the Spring of 1997. In the same way we've been in touch with Graham Whitehead and Steven Naylor who originally did the music. Robert More will be coming back to direct, as he did for the 1992 version which toured Great Britain. What I like most is the creative mix — some new people and some veterans and that goes for all aspects of a company's work.

Thompson: *So really there's a talented group of people from the region who can be put together here, or, as you say, repatriated ...*

Lewis: That's right. Even though they live in Vancouver or Toronto, they remain in touch. And, of course, we hear frequently from the veteran performers, and we hope that during our twenty-fifth birthday celebrations some of them will join us.

Thompson: *When is that?*

Lewis: Well, officially it begins in May. Mermaid received its first grant in March 1972 and our first performances were in Aldershot school in the spring of that year. We plan a masquerade gala in March with Bill Carr as our Master of Ceremonies. He's a good example of a Mermaid "old boy" who has certainly gone on to other things. And upon the company's return from the USA, we'll offer the final performance of *Just So Stories* at the Dunn Theatre in Halifax on May 11th. We'll also have a major retrospective of our masks and puppets at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia.

We often remember Evelyn, Tom Miller and Graham and their considerable contributions. I am very grateful for the support of my current colleagues. I want them to shape Mermaid Theatre in their own way. Some of our productions — for example, *Gulliver's Travels* and *Stuart Little* — were based on my own kids' favourite books. We performed Munro Leaf because Jim Morrow loved his work and read it to his children and for the same reasons we want to work with Sheree Fitch. I'll be monitoring future choices with great interest. It is like watching your family grow.

Hilary Thompson *has taught children's literature and children's theatre at Acadia University since 1976. She has published on fantasy in children's literature, as well as on image and text (see "Enclosure and Childhood in the illustrations of John and Thomas Bewick," in* ***Children's Literature*** *(1996). Her work with Dorothy Heathcote, a leading drama educator, informs her latest paper on education through drama published in* ***Canadian Tertiary Drama Educators: Perspectives on Practice*** *(U of Victoria P, 1995). She is editor of* ***Children's Voices in Atlantic Literature and Culture*** *(Guelph: Canadian Children's Press, 1995).*

Changing the World: An Interview with Writer JoAnne James

• *Anne Hiebert Alton* •

JoAnne James

Résumé: *Dans cette entrevue accordée le 26 septembre 1996 dans son bureau du Centre des Arts de Calgary, la dramaturge et productrice JoAnne James parle de ses oeuvres théâtrales et de sa carrière d'écrivain, de la signification du théâtre pour la jeunesse et, enfin, des objectifs du Festival international pour les enfants qu'elle organise à Calgary.*

Summary: *In this interview, which took place on Thursday, 26 September 1996, in her office at the Calgary Centre for Performing Arts, Calgary playwright and producer JoAnne James talks about the background to her plays and her writing career, the significance of writing for and entertaining children, and the aims of the Calgary International Children's Festival.*

JoAnne James hails from Thunder Bay, Ontario, but has also lived in British Columbia and Saskatchewan; she now makes her home in Calgary. She is a playwright, a single mother, and the Founding Producer of the Calgary International Children's Festival. James has won various awards, including the 1992 Woman of Distinction Award for Arts and Culture in Calgary, and the 1995 Harry and Martha Cohen Award for significant and sustained contribution to theatre in Calgary.

James has written four plays, three of which have been published in *Three Quest Plays*. Her first play, *Square Eyes* (not included in the anthology), tells the story of a boy who learns that his father is illiterate. *Square Eyes* has been performed in schools and theatres across Canada and the eastern United States over the last decade, and has been a tremendous success. Her new book, *Three*

Quest Plays (1996), is a collection of *Moving Day, The Echo Box,* and *Willa and Sam. The Echo Box* focuses on the dynamics of a relationship when a third child enters an already established friendship. James excels at portraying this delicate balance, subtly addressing Mitchell's implied loneliness when he isn't at the seaside with Hallie, Hallie's near hero-worship of Mitchell and her willingness to include another person into their friendship, and Nora's apparent leadership characteristics which conceal her own isolation. It also considers the function of memory and the importance of play in Hallie's, Nora's, and Mitchell's lives.

The companion pieces, *Moving Day* and *Willa and Sam,* also explore the dynamic of friendship and the significance of play. *Moving Day* spotlights the effect of the news that Willa and Benji must move away to Vancouver with their parents, leaving Willa's best friend Sam behind. Here James portrays Willa's and Sam's dismay at their impending separation with both sensitivity and insight: coupled with Willa's apprehension about moving and leaving Sam is her excitement at the thought of new challenges. In the end, it is Willa's connection with their private world of play that allows both girls to accept their separation. *Willa and Sam* is the sequel to *Moving Day,* and explores the changes that three years of absence have wrought in the girls' friendship, realised when Willa and Benji move back home to Calgary. This time it is Sam's affinity with the world of imagination which reconciles the girls to the transformation in both their friendship and each other.

JoAnne James is also the Founding Producer of the annual Calgary International Children's Festival, which celebrated its tenth anniversary this year. The Festival is held in Calgary every spring, when for six days the city is entertained and delighted by a variety of performances for children's audiences. The festival has been visited by groups from over forty countries; this year, the entertainers included storytellers, actors, dancers, musicians, acrobats, and puppeteers from throughout Canada, the United States, Ireland, Japan, the Philippines, Kenya, Australia, and the Czech Republic. James notes that the Festival is based "on the philosophy that an understanding of other cultures and an appreciation of the arts is an essential component of the educational process." She adds, "The priorities I have as a producer reflect the ones I have as a mother. Like every parent, I want the very best for Gemma. I want her to know that the world is wide and that her life is filled with limitless choices. The Festival is ideally placed to illuminate this for every child."

The following interview took place on Thursday, 26 September 1996, in JoAnne James's office at the Calgary Centre for Performing Arts. James spoke with me for nearly ninety minutes, commenting on the background to both her writing career and her plays, the significance of writing for and entertaining children, her vision for the place of children in the world, and the aims of the Calgary International Children's Festival.

Anne Hiebert Alton: *Is becoming a playwright something you've always wanted to be? Do you think of yourself as a playwright?*

JoAnne James: I think of myself as a playwright, yes. I'm very proud of the plays. They've taken a lot of time — my daughter is thirteen years old, and I've been

writing plays for as long as she's been on the planet earth, because I started the first play when I was home with her. She was just a baby, so certainly that's been a real focus in my career for the last thirteen years.

But whether that was something I dreamed of as a child — I can't say that's true. When I was a child, what I wanted to be more than anything was an actress, and I guess I thought that was the thing that could be achieved. I didn't realise that there were other things that I could do; I was always involved in plays. When I went to university that's what I studied. I discovered play-writing at the university, and I enjoyed it very much. I'd always enjoyed writing, and it came together for me at the university. The university here in Calgary has quite a strong focus on theatre for young audiences, and I really fell in love with that genre: I really respond to a young audience and what they seem to look for in a play, the questions that they're looking to answer in their own minds.

I have a wonderful blend of career, a day job and my own creative work. In my work for the Festival, I'm always looking at scripts and going to other festivals. I was on a playwrights' panel last week, and the phrase I like the best for doing that research, looking at other people's work, is: "I fill the well." I came across another phrase which is the opposite of that, from Van Gogh: he said that he would walk and enjoy nature, and he talked about the whole notion that when he didn't do what I called "filling the well" he had what he called meagreness. I thought it was such a perfect, perfect phrase, because you're always trying to fill yourself up with experiences. So I feel that I'm very well placed.

Alton: *Do you think of yourself as a children's playwright?*

James: Yes.

Alton: *So you write plays for children — as opposed to simply writing plays?*

James: Well, I have a little soapbox that I do for that question — I write for people, and it happens that the people that I write for are young people, but I have a problem with the categorization of our audience: I don't think we do the same thing to adults: we don't say they are in the age group between thirty to forty! I think I write for people, they're young people, though I've had great response from adults.

I had a wonderful conversation with Janet Lunn last year and she said something that really stuck with me: if you ask people what their most memorable reading experiences are, they will often tell you about a book that they read as a child. I'm asked this question a lot, why I work in the children's area, and I'm always struck by it, because if you're in room in a workshop setting where you're generally talking about the arts, and if you throw out the question of what was the moment at a performing arts event that stays with people the most, that they'll always remember, many will remember something that they saw as a child. Our big moments — and I think as children we're more open to them — are epic moments. When you go into a theatre with a play for grown-up people, the audience is sitting talking, but also worrying about where they parked the car, what they'll pay the baby-sitter, where they'll go for drinks afterwards, who's sitting with who, how do they look, all those things, and the buzz is quite unfocused. But if you come to the Festival, for me it's very exciting to be in the

Photo by Trudie Lee

*From **Willa and Sam***
Left to right: Heather Kennedy, Shannon Quinn.

audience. There's a level of interest, there's a buzz that's very exciting, and when the lights come down and the sound goes up at a children's performance, in my opinion, there's the feeling that something is going to happen. If what you have created is good enough, it could really affect somebody! It could make their world a little bit bigger, it could challenge them to go forward in a different direction. You really feel that possibility, and I think that as we grow older we sometimes lose the excitement of that possibility. So I'm really fortunate to work in a field where that's true.

But this question of why you write for children, whether you're satisfied in writing for children, I find it really intriguing. Other people have answered the question far better than I have. For instance, P.L. Travers, who wrote *Mary Poppins*, said she was watching somebody being interviewed on TV who was asked the same question, "Why do you write for children?" And she got up to the TV screen and said, "Say because you have *been* a child!" and the person said, "Because I have been a child." A great story. I think we all have that shared experience.

Alton: *Do you think that by writing for children you're tapping back into that sense of excitement?*

James: Oh definitely, absolutely!

Alton: *That was the feeling I had in reading your plays. I kept thinking, "I remember that! How can she reproduce that memory so clearly?" It was wonderful.*

James: Thank you. I think there are a couple of answers to that: I have a fabulous daughter, and the plays in *Three Quest Plays* are based on things that happened in life, except for *Willa and Sam*, which is a 'dream come true' play — Gemma said,

why don't you write a play about Willa moving back?

Alton: *What sorts of events inspired the plays in* Three Quest Plays*?*

James: *The Echo Box* is set at the beach we go to every summer, and I watched Gemma struggle with the relationships at that beach. She has one really good friend there, and when another friend comes to visit, Gemma always has trouble negotiating that balance of who to be friends with during that one week we're there. So that was the jumping off place for it: it was just that situation and the idea of the person upsetting the balance. In the volume it's presented first.

I wrote *Moving Day* first, but *Moving Day* and *Willa and Sam* are placed together. *Moving Day* is based on the very sad fact in my daughter's life that her best friend Emily moved away to Kelowna. They were younger then — seven — but I placed them later. It was a very, very difficult thing for Gemma to say goodbye to Emily, and so that was the jumping off point for that play.

And then with *Willa and Sam* what I really wanted to hook up was that crossover from childhood to adolescence, and that is where my daughter is now, and has been hovering for the last couple of years. When I was working on that piece, that's what intrigued me the most, the child who still wants to play and the one that is ready to leap off into the teenage life. I read a lot of research that Carol Gilligan did at Harvard about being at the crossroads: she does amazing research into young girls, and how at the age of eleven or twelve they start to lose their physical confidence, they start to emulate their peers in ways they haven't in the past, and they lose their sense of adventure and imagination. So I was intrigued by that whole subject because of my own daughter, and that's what I wanted to

Nikki Lundmark and Lindsay Burns in a scene from Moving Day *by JoAnne James, produced by Quest Theatre, Calgary.*

hook into. I presented that as an idea to do as a piece, and it was after that that I thought that it could be done with the familiar characters of Willa and Sam. So it was a bit different, how I approached it. I just found — and still find — that whole area a fascinating process, that whole idea that they have to leave play behind just because they're getting older. I think if I'm proud of any of the feedback that I've had on the work, it's that it's been said that I celebrate play.

Alton: *I think that's very true.*

James: I wanted to because I think they play! They're surrounded by so much screen media, by so many activities, so many energies, so much advertising, even more than we ever had to deal with. I think the things that anchor Sam are really very interesting — and that's Gemma, she's the kid with the wall full of whales, the story of the kid with the mother who did the story of whales, the lights through the house. I did that, and I put it in *Willa and Sam.* I saw this spinning Japanese paper lamp in Toronto and thought, "The lamp's fantastic!" I had to make an event out of it, so I wrote Gemma a special story, called "Sophie the Whale," and I wound the lights up through our house, and turned off all the lamps, and it was quite magical. I took her whale watching, too. And I don't want her to lose that anchor, or that sense of wonder; she doesn't have to!

Alton: *Your work shows that you haven't lost it either; is that what you hope for the kids who watch your plays?*

James: Oh, definitely, of course! We got fabulous feedback on *Willa and Sam* from kids during the discussion period.

Alton: *So you take your plays around to schools?*

James: All three plays have been performed here by Quest Theatre, and by other theatres as well; *Square Eyes* has been produced by a lot of different theatres. Duve Lang is the Artistic Director of Quest Theatre, and he's my collaborator; they've all been professionally produced and taken on school tours.

Alton: *You've mentioned discussion periods, is this a formal thing?*

James: It's an informal discussion, but all the plays are accompanied by study guides that go out, previous to the performance, with pre-visit activities that teachers can do with kids and post-visit activities as well.

Alton: *Do you write those?*

James: No, other people do; they have a teacher that they work with to do a study guide.

Alton: *So this is really "instruction with delight" — schools and study guides and specific things for discussion; the educational aspect is obviously there.*

James: Oh, very much so — and the feedback from teachers has been great!

Alton: *Do you have rules when you're writing a play?*

James: Unfortunately, yes. Because all three of these plays have been developed and premiered at Quest Theatre, there are boundaries: the play has to be no longer than forty-five minutes, and no more than three characters, all played by professional actors — I should say three actors rather than three characters, you could have one actor playing more than one character, but since my work tends to be

quite realistic, I've always just used three characters. Obviously the setting has to be easy to perform as well. Those are the boundaries, you work within those.

The up side of that is that I know those parameters and I know how to make them work, and there's been a very supportive team of people behind those productions, especially my colleague, Artistic Director Duval Lang. He and I work together very well: we've known each other probably almost twenty years, we've had a lot of trust in collaboration together. The down side is that there are those restrictions.

One of the things that I'm trying to do now, I hesitate to say it out loud because it's a little scary, but I am trying to write a novel for children. I'd like to have a wider scope. I love writing dialogue, I'd like to be able to enter the minds of kids and be more than a narrator. There are a lot fewer rules, and I want to try it!

Alton: *Have you begun?*

James: Yes! Those ideas are dreams that I've had — you always want to try something else. I took a screen-writing course last year and thought it might be challenging to try a screen play. I'd like to explore more forums, because with the completion of *Willa and Sam*, that's four plays. But because of the Festival, I'm very busy, and I'm a single parent, so every one of those plays, including *Willa and Sam*, took at least two years, mostly at night and on weekends.

Alton: *So the whole notion of a structured routine, sitting down from nine to five and devoting the day to writing, is not something you've been able to do?*

James: No, but with *Willa and Sam* I had a wonderful opportunity: I was invited to be a participant at the playwrights' colony at the Banff Centre two summers ago, and so I found myself for thirteen days — I know exactly how many days! — at Banff in a room with my laptop and a company of actors, not just me but a whole group of people with whom I could have readings, and I could be working on my piece, and my director was there, so there were workshops. That part of it was fabulous, but for me the luxury of not having a ringing phone, not having Gemma to look after, there's food there for you ....

Alton: *Sounds like a writer's heaven!*

James: Yeah, it was magnificent, and I took full advantage of it — and I got the whole second draft of *Willa and Sam* done, so I think that was the best writing experience I've had, just the best. I think probably *The Echo Box* was the hardest one to keep going back to and going over again; I found that one really hard.

Alton: *That's my favourite.*

James: Probably because it took the most effort!

Alton: *I'd like to talk a bit about philosophy and writing for children. Ursula Le Guin recently gave a talk in Calgary, during which she commented that she writes in "despised genres" — meaning science fiction, women's literature, fantasy, children's literature. She also said something very similar to what you said in your Calgary Herald article earlier this year (15 March 1996) when you commented on the Dunblane tragedy: she said, "We are living in a world which despises children." What's your reaction to that statement? Do you think it's true?*

James: Well, I hate that comment, but I'd have to agree with it. I think we have to

do more than just tolerate children and childhood, we have to celebrate it! It's the same as what Janet Lunn said about paediatrics, in medicine, it's looked down on — why is that? I don't know the answer to that, and I guess I fight against it; I just find that this is an audience that deserves all our respect! In my work with the Festival I'm told that the best way that we can raise money to support what we do is to say that we're raising the audience of tomorrow, and my response is always, "No we're not, they're a valid audience right now!" Just because they're eight doesn't mean they're less valid than someone who is forty-eight, and I'll take anybody on who tries to tell me that they are. My image that I use in that speech — when people try to tell me that that's the way to approach this — is that I feel like I've got all these kids and I've got a character bringing them into the gingerbread house, to be enchanted, and I bring them in through the back door, and when they exit through the front door they're still children, but they're children dressed in tuxedos and carrying chequebooks, and writing subscription cheques to the symphony and the opera, and I've tricked them somehow in this gingerbread house! And that's *not* what it's about at all — that's not why they're here. They're here to be challenged and enchanted and confronted and delighted and all of those things!

Alton: *Transported — but not into little adults, rather into some other realm.*

James: Exactly! To say that they're despised is really harsh, but there's some truth to that, and it's very painful. I find that with this work, and with the Festival. When we bring in our children's artists I treat them with the utmost respect, they're not treated as second-class performers because they're choosing to perform for children. That's what gives me great satisfaction, putting them in a theatre, giving the show great lighting, great technical support, the kids come in and sit in real seats, the lights come down — transported is a good word.

Alton: *Jan Truss said something of children's theatre, she said: "I want to think of theatre as a special occasion of heightened experience — another door to the soul" ["Soliloquy by One Who Writes for Children's Theatre,"* CCL *8/9 (1977): 70-73].*

James: That's great, that's it!

Alton: *The mission statement of the Calgary International Children's Festival is: "To change the world by surrounding children with excellence so that they can recognize their own power and demand excellence from the rest of their lives." Is this what you want to do? How do you want to change the world?*

James: Yeah, I'd love to change things, and that's how: by surrounding kids with excellence so that they will recognize their own power and then use that power. This came out of the horrifying idea that kids are reading books without authors: they were reading *Strawberry Shortcake* books then. So your kid could read a book about a product; the people who made the book put out the product, and there was no care at all of what the story was, and all these books were being created to sell products. At that time I felt that kids were being bombarded with all this commercialism, and they still are, and now with the internet and all this other stuff, they're constantly bombarded — so they've got a lot to deal with. So when I say surrounding them with excellence, I mean what we do at the Festival, where we have the opportunity to bring them into a space and instead of being bombarded with the image of somebody selling them a character in order to buy

a toy, they will see a puppeteer or a dancer or actor who's trained for years to tell them stories. I think that if that excellence enters them — like you said, takes them into another realm — then we can equip them. I think children as they grow become more well rounded and capable adults if they can express themselves, if they can be in touch with their feelings, if they learn about creativity, if they learn about ways to just put themselves out there, take risks — art is also about risk. So when I talk about surrounding them with excellence, the whole idea is to get inside them, then they realise within their own hearts that they can make the world better. I find that a defining idea, and we really use that — we often look at each other and say, "Ah yes, but is it going to change the world?"

Alton: *What kind of world do you want? Ten years from now?*

James: I'd like there to be no sexism, I'd like there to be a world where my daughter has every opportunity open to her, I'd like a world that is free, I'd like a place where diversity is celebrated, where differences are embraced.

In a perfect universe, I'd like better quality, equal opportunity, a real sense of play, and I'd like to turn the TVs off, and celebrate books, go to the theatre, have fun, play with the children. I would have every school teach children about emotional intelligence as well as intellectual intelligence, and teach kids to be in touch with their feelings. That is going to make them more successful, healthy human beings. I'd get them to realise what's sacred and what's divine, and be in touch with the creative. I'd like people in charge to look at the world through the eyes of a child, and give them the respect that they so richly deserve. I have a quote by a Lacodo Sioux, performer Kevin Locke, who said: "It's easier to build children than to repair adults."

Alton: *Are you doing exactly what it is you want to do? Would you like to give it all up and write full time?*

James: It's very tempting — I'd love to take a break; I'm the founder of this Festival, and it's a lot of work — so if somebody came along and said, "We've figured out a way that you could take a sabbatical" I'd be really happy, even for six months.

Alton: *Would you write?*

James: I'd love to! But I don't see a way just now.

Alton: *How do you feel when you see your plays performed — and now, having your first volume in print, holding it in your hands?*

James: For me, that was the result of many years of work, those three plays; that's a big piece of me. The difference between being a playwright and the writer of other works is that moment when you can stand at the back of the theatre and see things come together: there are actors, a director, a designer, lights and music, everything that goes into it, it's very collaborative. You're standing at the back of the theatre and you hear the words, and they all come out of your head. It's really a very, very exciting, uplifting moment — it really is, and I'm not sure how writing a novel will be; reading novels is so private.

Alton: *On the other hand, your book would be on the shelves for kids to read.*

James: True, but I'm a bit daunted by that, I really am. I don't know if I can do it,

I don't have a deadline, nobody's waiting for it. One thing about when I'm working on a new play, I know when I have to have the first draft, attend the first workshop; it's very structured. It has to be because it's all professionally done, there are people to be hired, there's money to be raised. Whereas, this is just a little file that's sitting in my workroom at home — I get to it when I can; there's real freedom there, on one level.

Alton: *Last question: if you were going to introduce yourself to someone who didn't know who you are or what you do, what would you say?*

James: I'm a searcher; I'm somebody who's always trying to figure life out. I think by doing my own work, I'm constantly trying to figure myself out too. I say that Sam is Gemma — but they're really all me. There's a big chunk of Willa, the person who charges forward, who says, "I have seen the future and it's big!" That's a big part of me. But I'm also Sam, siting back and living a quieter life, contemplating. I found myself at a function last year where somebody who didn't know me asked what I did, and I heard myself say, "I'm a writer." I felt proud of that — it's exciting!

Plays by JoAnne James

Square Eyes. 1986. Unpublished Play. Several performances by Quest Theatre in Calgary, premiering in 1986; also performed at the Grand Theatre in London, Ontario, the Neptune Theatre in Halifax, Nova Scotia, the Manitoba Theatre for Young People in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and the Green Thumb Theatre in Vancouver, BC; toured for two months in Alberta and BC schools in 1990 as well as in the eastern United States in 1993.

Three Quest Plays. Red Deer, Alberta: Red Deer College Press, 1996.

Moving Day. 1989. Performed in elementary schools and community halls throughout Alberta in 1989; other performances include a Quest Theatre production in Calgary, Alberta, and a production at the Manitoba Theatre for Young People in Winnipeg; also performed at Calgary International Children's Festival in 1989.

The Echo Box. 1992. Performed by Quest Theatre in Calgary in 1993; also toured for three months in Alberta in 1993.

Willa and Sam. 1996. Performed by Quest Theatre in 1996 in Alberta schools.

Anne Hiebert Alton *received her PhD in Victorian literature from the University of Toronto last year, spent 1996 as Honorary Research Associate at the University of Sydney, Australia, and is now an Assistant Professor at Central Michigan University with primary teaching responsibilities in children's literature. She has published articles on Charlotte Brontë, Dickens, and children's literature, and is currently writing a book on Victorian spinsters.*

Profile: Lois Burdett

• *Lynn A. Cecil* •

Figure 1: Lois Burdett and her students brainstorm about Shakespeare, his life, and his work.

Enseignante dans une école élémentaire de Stratford en Ontario, Lois Burdett a développé une approche pédagogique résolument innovatrice. Fondée sur une initiation pratique des élèves à l'oeuvre de Shakespeare, elle trouve son achèvement dans la mise en scène d'une pièce. Cette expérience a eu un succès tel que ses élèves ont fait une tournée au Canada et aux États-Unis. La méthode de Lois Burdett est applicable à l'enseignement de n'importe quel sujet.

Lois Burdett, an elementary school teacher in Stratford, Ontario, has developed an innovative approach in introducing Shakespeare's plays to young students. The success of her method has resulted in her students performing his plays both in Canada and the USA, as well as in her producing several publications, and it is applicable to the teaching of any subject.

Lois Burdett's innovative approach to teaching children as young as seven and eight about Shakespeare's life and times has captured the attention of numerous adult educators in North America and England. The recipient of numerous awards, Burdett also conducts workshops for other teachers. With the first three publications in her *Shakespeare Can Be Fun!* series, she has combined her retellings of Shakespeare's life and plays with her students' letters and paintings about the Bard.

I first glimpsed her approach a year ago when I was driving into Stratford, Ontario. Large, vividly coloured Shakespearean characters — painted by second

and third graders — filled over 50 panels along the sidewalk. Later, I spoke with Lois Burdett, the elementary school teacher behind this display. Approximately 20 years ago, as a teacher in Hamlet School, one of the Stratford schools which are named for Shakespeare's characters, Lois discovered that few of her students knew anything about the reason for the school's name. Some thought Shakespeare was one of the big kids in the school. She set out to engage her students as detectives: they were to find out who Shakespeare was.

First, they barnstormed together to tally what they already knew [see Figure 1]; then they searched through books, looked at pictures, studied maps. They became involved in his life, and dramatized an interview with him and his family. They followed his marriage to Anne Hathaway, were thrilled at his theatrical success, and were saddened when his son Hamnet died. He became their friend: they drew pictures and wrote letters to him, his family, and his characters. In the process, their language and communication skills improved tremendously. They learned the plots of the plays through Lois's retellings, and then faced the Elizabethan language of the actual texts as a challenge, not a hurdle. One of Burdett's first students, Leanne Mark, who is now working on her education degree, says that studying Shakespeare's plays again in high school was a treat since she came to them with a positive attitude rather than with fears that his plays were "difficult."

Burdett is a firm believer in the philosophy that we "learn by

Dear William,
Yes I will go out with you tonight. All I need is time with you. Your eyes glitter like stars. Your dazzling clothes are magnifisint We could have a great fyoucher. We'll have lots of children. William Shakespeare I admire you with glee.
Your honey
Annie

Figure 2. Eight-year-old Alex Woodley, writing as Anne Hathaway, accepts a date with William Shakespeare.

Figure 3. Marijke Altenburg's artistic interpretation of Anne Hathaway.

Photo courtesy of Scott Wishart, *The Beacon Herald*

Figure 4. Robyn Lafontaine (age 7), engrossed in her role as Sir Toby Belch, helps Ali Kara (age 7) move into his part.

for acting, and for watching theatre. One special project, entitled "Bard's Buddies," entailed pairing each student with a backstage theatre employee. This introduced the students to the nitty-gritty aspects of theatre work such as learning how to do lighting, wigs and costumes, and choreographed swordfighting.

The expressions of Robyn Lafontaine's face as Sir Toby Belch, and Anika Johnson's as Shakespeare at age 32 [see Figures 4 and 5], demonstrate the seriousness with which Burdett's students approach their dramatic roles. Her new students each September look forward to performing a play, or the story of his life, as a great adventure. Her method of retelling the Bard's plays in rhyming couplets makes it easier for young children to learn the text. Her doing." She intends to render learning meaningful. She brings people from the Festival into her classroom, and takes her class to meet people involved with the Festival. An outing for her students to the theatre is used to sharpen their math skills: they order tickets, collect, and count money. Her students became involved in supporting the restoration of England's Globe Theatre: they raised money for it and had the honour of sending a time-capsule, filled with special items from Stratford, Ontario, to England.

When her students began performing their own versions of Shakespeare's plays, the professional actors at Stratford came to watch. This gala evening became an annual event. By incorporating dramatic performance in her teaching, Burdett has inspired her students with a passion for language,

Photo courtesy of Robin Wilhelm

Figure 5. Anika Johnson (age 7) breathes life into her role as Shakespeare at age 32.

students can speak eloquently about Shakespeare's life and plays, as was seen when they were interviewed by Peter Gzowski for CBC Radio's "Morningside" program — as well as for a forthcoming documentary film.

Another thrill for her students occurred several years ago when they were invited to Texas to perform a Shakespeare play for the state's 150th anniversary celebration. The students wrote a song to commemorate the event, and it became a hit on the local radio station. The latest international performance given by her students was in Utah this past summer, funded in part by special grants from private businesses. Burdett's grade two and three students performed *Macbeth* and also attended a performance at Utah's Globe Theatre.

Burdett has published magazine articles outlining her approach to teaching, and she earned a Hilroy Fellowship Provincial Award in 1986. She continues to travel throughout North America conducting workshops. Recently, she was awarded her second Writers' Award by the Federation of Women Teachers' Associations, and the prestigious Meritorious Service Medal by Government House of Canada.

Her hands-on approach is explained in her publications: *Twelfth Night for Kids*, *A Child's Portrait of Shakespeare*, and *Macbeth*, the first three books in her Shakespeare Can Be Fun! series. Narrated in rhyming couplets, her texts lend themselves well to choral reading, a popular method for teaching reading to primary students. Complementing her written retellings of Shakespeare's plays and the narrative of his life are drawings and letters produced by her students. She includes some of the letters written by her students, pretending to be Shakespeare or someone in his family [see Figure 2]. Burdett has another book planned for release this spring (1997): *A Midsummer Night's Dream for Kids*.

Lois Burdett feels her methods of teaching can be applied to any subject. In Sarnia, where she began her career as an educator, she taught her students to feel pride in their city's oil refineries, just as she has taught her Stratford students to feel proud of their link to Shakespeare. She believes that when students feel a sense of civic pride or ownership — whether in a theatre, a factory, or some other local distinction — their comprehension increases because they are engaged.

***Lynn A. Cecil** is an elementary school teacher in London, Ontario, with a recent MA in English from the University of Western Ontario.*

Partners in Practice

• *Lorraine Behnan* •

Résumé: *Le cours "Théâtre pour jeunes auditoires", offert par le Département d'art dramatique de l'Université de Guelph, permet aux étudiants de créer et de présenter des oeuvres originales à des élèves des écoles élémentaires des environs. Cette expérience est rendue possible grâce à une entente avec les milieux scolaires de la région. L. Behnan met en relief les avantages qu'offre une telle entente pour les enfants et les futurs praticiens du théâtre pour la jeunesse.*

Summary: *Theatre for Young Audiences (35-240) is a twelve-week semester course offered by the University of Guelph Department of Drama. The program teaches the theory and practice of theatre and drama in education. The students learn how to structure and present the performance of plays and accompanying drama workshops to children of the elementary school panel. The experiential component of the course is possible through a partnership with local elementary schools. This paper addresses the origin of the partnership, course objectives and content, challenges of implementing the partnership, and benefits to the university students and school children.*

The course is 35-240, Theatre for Young Audiences. The buzz among the students is that the curriculum is challenging and applicable to a range of educational and professional endeavours. There is always a waiting list to be one of the twenty-four students participating in this Limited Enrolment Course at the University of Guelph. Over the years, the course has gone through a series of significant changes. Presently, the course structure revolves around a partnership between the Drama Department and three local elementary schools.

The Transition Years

When I took over the course in 1987 I undertook some ambitious changes. The Department of Drama had hired me on the basis of my expertise as a drama instructor and professional actor working with the techniques of both Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) and Drama in Education (DIE). I had worked as an actor and drama workshop instructor with The Citadel and Catalyst Theatres in Edmonton, The Grand Theatre Young Company in London, The Theatre Hour Company, and Young People's Theatre in Toronto. I discovered that the combination of TYA and DIE can provide a powerful and valuable learning experience. TYA offers a presentational format that is both beneficial to the student actor and entertaining for the young audiences. I felt, however, that the equally valuable component of DIE needed to be given more focus within the 35-240 course

structure. For instance, if prior to seeing a performance, a child is effectively prepared for the themes, objectives and synopsis of the play through a series of drama activities, she is more likely to understand the purpose, plot and characterization. Then, following the performance, the play itself can then become a springboard for activities that allow the child to extend the theatre experience by exploring the various facets of the production through subjective role- play and drama structures. For example, if in preparing an elementary class for the performance of Carol Bolt's "My Best Friend is Twelve Feet High," a play about the power struggle among a small group of children as they distribute the responsibilities in their newly-founded clubhouse, I would develop drama activities that explore the importance of cooperative play, the power of imagination, and the qualities of leadership. "Bedtime and Bullies" by Dennis Foon is thematically geared to exploring the inappropriate labelling and judgments of children, the reasons for bullying behaviour, and facing fears.

I was excited by the notion of transferring my professional knowledge to the academic forum but felt concern that such a course might not succeed within the constraint of a twelve week semester with only four hours of scheduled class time per week. It took a few semesters of experimentation before a workable course emerged. Throughout this process, the students themselves became partners in developing the course content. These early students assumed a heavier assignment load than the subsequent groups who reaped the benefits of their pioneering.

Developing the Method

My first goal in the classroom was to prepare my students for the actual encounters with young people. I wanted them to understand the behaviours of primary, junior, and intermediate children. Thus I encouraged the class to make brave and uninhibited attempts to approximate the antics and dialogue of young people. The goal was to try to capture the essence of the over-zealous six-year-old or lanky, self-conscious pre-teen. I spent a lot of energy trying to explain the difference between behaving child-like and behaving childishly. However, I knew nothing could compare to the experience of working with real live children. I came to see that I needed some kind of partnership between my students and real children. In 1993 I was presented with such an opportunity.

Christine Lenssen, a student enrolled in my Theatre for Young Audiences course became so enthusiastic over what she thought the program could offer to teachers and students in the elementary classroom that she urged her husband, who was Vice-Principal at St. John school in Guelph, to investigate the possibility of integrating drama into the curriculum at his school. When Will Lenssen contacted me, asking if I would be interested in facilitating drama classes for his teachers, I began to visualize all kinds of creative options. Instead of providing him with one instructor — me — I would offer him twenty-four — my students! Will suggested that we investigate The Guelph and Wellington Career Education Council Partnership Program. The Career Council's Mission statement is "To provide students with the information and experiences necessary to make realistic career decisions." Part of its mandate is to "bring all the educational resources within a community together" and "to serve as a system-wide umbrella

for co-operative projects of business, labour and education." The chair of my department, Ric Knowles, was enthusiastic about the project and its benefits for both the Drama Department and the wider community.

This partnership combines many of the training tools and objectives of the other Drama Department courses. The students use the performance techniques taught in the acting courses, and skills learned in Script Analysis prepare them to analyze text in order to interpret and communicate the intent of the playwright to an audience. Finally, theatre requires an audience to be fully experienced. The young people at the elementary schools fulfilled the audience role for our TYA plays.

After four years, elementary school teachers like Ann Larsen and Allan Assellin who have participated in the partnership since its inception now use drama routinely in their classrooms. They testify to the benefits of TYA and DIE in various areas: (1) timid children emerge (2) children with behavioural problems increase their attentiveness (3) all children enhance their retention of facts and figures through active play and (4) most children develop their social skills through interactive communication and problem solving. Teachers like Ann and Allan understand that drama need not be an isolated subject, but rather is one that is integrated into every aspect of the curriculum. For example, teachers in other partnership schools have used drama to activate poems in English class or to time-travel back in history in order to role-play specific politicians, scientists, and explorers. Children take imaginary journeys to other parts of the world to learn about the cultures and peoples of different countries: a classroom is temporarily turned into a mock courtroom to augment the study of the judicial system, or conflict resolution is practiced through role-playing and forum theatre. Drama in the classroom can be spontaneous and requires few or no materials.

At the post-secondary educational level the interest in drama also appears to be on the rise. Guelph's Drama Department is seeing a shift from students who take acting classes as preparation for a professional theatre career to those who take classes to build confidence in presentation skills and creative development. They want to adapt the skills developed in acting classes to those needed for seminar presentations and other areas such as job-searches.

In the Theatre for Young Audiences course, I have noticed an increased enrolment of students from the department of Family and Child Studies. The interaction between drama and the child and family study majors provides an opportunity for both groups to exchange their talents and thereby enhance their areas of expertise. For instance, in the rehearsal and performance component of the 35-240 course, drama majors coach their peers in the art of acting. Conversely, when the focus is on the interactive drama workshop, the Family and Child Studies students share their experience of working with children. It is an integration of departments which provides a cooperative environment where the students can take ownership of the learning process.

The Course Structure

Presently this course is a combination of lectures, discussions, seminars, practical drama and theatre sessions, and it leads to the rehearsal and presentation of a contemporary script.

1. The Observation Project

Each student attends and observes a primary, junior, and intermediate class at one of our partnership schools. Information about the behaviour, interests, and comprehension skills of each age group is incorporated into the workshops, seminars and performance presentations. The students are given a specific guideline for observation:

(a) The Teachers

- how do they maintain attention of the class?
- what motivational techniques do they use?
- what is their delivery style and vocabulary for teaching instructions?
- does the classroom set up / environment enhance the l earning process?

(b) The Children

- what are the distinguishing characteristics at primary, junior and intermediate levels?
- how do they respond to different teaching styles?
- what factors affect their attention span
- what topics interest them? (favourite idols, music and TV shows)
- what popular phrases and jargon do they use?

2. The Drama Workshop

The university class is divided into groups of five or six. Each group researches a playwright who has written for young audiences. One play by that writer is studied in depth and becomes the foundation for their drama workshop. The group collaborate in the development and presentation of a thematic workshop. The purpose of the workshop is to explore the main themes of four plays that are examined in the 34-240 class. Each workshop group develops a series of drama activities that incorporate the themes of the play and at the end of the semester the workshop is presented to a group of twenty children who actively participate.

The workshop immediately follows a performance of one of the four plays examined in the 35-240 course. Each play is targeted to a specific audience: primary, junior or intermediate. The length of the workshop is approximately forty-five to sixty minutes, depending upon the grade level. Primary attention span is usually limited to forty-five minutes whereas junior and intermediate are capable of sustaining focus for the full hour.

The university workshop leaders may choose to team-teach the drama activities with the school children or they may present them individually just as long as each leader has equal facilitation time over the duration of the workshop. All leaders are responsible for the overall structure of the workshop which includes the process of choosing a diverse selection of activities such as movement, mime, role-playing, storytelling and tableaux. They are encouraged to augment the workshop with audio visual aids that may include taped music, musical instruments, photos, picture-books, news articles or cartoons. In the workshop these activities are used as vehicles for the practical exploration of the themes identified in the play. The workshop is introduced to the children by presenting open-ended questions and comments that will help set up the activity

and themes of the play. At the end of the workshop, the process is summarized by recapping the themes once again by using open-ended questions to determine what the children have understood from the process.

In preparation for the development of the workshops, as the class instructor, I hold a brainstorming and planning meeting with each workshop group. The groups are given two weeks to plan and structure the workshops. The workshops are first presented to the 35-240 with the university students acting as the school children. These trial presentations allow the university students to determine if the workshop is sound and workable. The instructor and the other university students offer constructive criticism concerning the inventiveness, presentation of content, and the facilitation style and skills. Each workshop group has about three weeks to make the necessary adjustments before presenting the finalized workshop to the elementary school children.

Accompanying this workshop are handouts of the activities. All students in the group write a paper explaining the purpose and method of their activity. The content of the paper includes the following topics: main themes, targeted age group, name of the activity, materials required, opening statements & questions, procedural instructions, summary statements & questions.

3. The Play Presentation

The same 35-240 workshop groups continue to work together on the presentation of the play that they explored for the drama workshops. Using *Story Theatre* style, unless the play is under forty minutes and may be done in its entirety, the group selects scenes from the script that best reflect the themes of the play. Whenever necessary, scene transitions and narration will be written and delivered by a member or members of the group. Once again, the entire group is responsible for creating any production materials: props, set pieces, costumes, and soundscapes. Approximately ten class hours are allotted to each play for rehearsals under the direction of the course instructor. All other preparations and rehearsals have to be scheduled apart from class.

The culmination of the two components, the drama workshop and the performance presentation, take place in the partnership schools during the last week of the semester. One of the most complicated parts of the course is to match the time-tables of the university students with the school hours of the elementary schools. After a lot of juggling and compromising, we manage to succeed in devising a workable schedule.

At the end of each semester, as I observe my students interacting with the partnership youngsters and their teachers, I am always struck by how we manage to put this all together in such a short period of time under such challenging circumstances. Never, however, do I doubt the value of the effort and the ambitious goals that we all set for ourselves.

The Benefits of the Partnership

The partnership program provides many opportunities for the students of 35-240 (Theatre for Young Audiences) by letting them obtain

- exposure to elementary schools where they have direct contact with a diverse group of children, including those with special needs,
- first-hand observations of teacher and pupil interaction,
- performance and leadership experience,
- practice with problem-solving skills when the unexpected occurs, and
- the opportunity to evaluate their interest in pursuing a career involving young people.

In preparation for their interaction with the youngsters, I advise my students that despite thorough preparation and the belief that, "you have seen it all," there will always be a new dilemma to confound them. They will have to think on their feet without letting the students catch on. Some of the more memorable experiences of my previous students become part of my present class lectures. For instance, one primary workshop activity involved the creation of a powerful magic potion. As the circle of little wizards tasted their imaginary concoction, one young fellow captivated his mates by apparently dying of poison: he gave one of the most convincing death scenes I have ever witnessed on stage. Of course, all the other little wizards thought this was terrific fun and the copy cat 'actors' all began enacting the most melodramatic forms of expiration. With his class out of control, the immobilized student leader turned to me for help. I suggested he ask the few remaining wizards who elected to 'live' for a solution to this problem. Although he was shaky and sceptical, he complied. No sooner was the question posed than an excited voice responded, "Why don't we make another potion, sprinkle it on them, and bring them back to life?" The student teacher broke into a Cheshire smile and shouted, "Brilliant!" Indeed. The lesson the student teacher learned was that the facilitator does not need to have all of the answers, nor should he. The objective is to allow the children the opportunities to problem-solve and more often than not their solutions will be innovative and pleasantly unpredictable.

Performing to their 35-240 classmates pales in comparison to the experience of performing to an audience of young people. I see the excitement of my students as they enjoy the immediate and unexpected responses from the children. At these moments they truly begin to trust the impact of the text. At the end of the performances wide-eyed children fall over themselves to make contact with actors and deliver a battery of innocent and charming questions. Such occasions are a powerful testimony to the value of theory tied to practice.

Many of my previous students stay in contact with me, giving updates on the subsequent benefits of having taken this children's theatre course. Some have been accepted into teacher's college, others have found summer employment involving young people, still others have been cast in companies that produce Theatre for Young Audiences.

How do the schools feel about our partnership? Each year a new school asks to be added. For now, however, I have set the limit to three. Principals and Vice-Principals, local Boards of Education, and the parents enthusiastically endorse the program. The same teachers volunteer to participate every year. The children who participate remember the experience and their student teachers.

I recall that at one of the official partnership ceremonies I quoted Albert Einstein's famous line, "Imagination is more powerful than knowledge." A child in the junior level piped up "$E=MC^2$." I quipped "Good for You ... you get the prize!" A full year later as I walked down the hall of the same school the child stopped me and asked what his prize was. He also noted that I was wearing the same vest that I had worn the year before. Much to my chagrin, this child had clearly benefited from the aural and observation drama concentration exercises!

The partnership program has grown beyond the Theatre for Young audiences course. Children from local elementary schools are often cast in our Drama Department Inner Stage productions on campus. We have provided assistant directors for local school plays and most recently 35-240 students have even had the opportunity to exercise their play-writing skills as well as their directing and teaching talents. Drama department students plan and teach their own drama workshops in after-school and lunch hour programs. Senior students from the elementary schools and high school students attend acting classes to foster their interest in theatre arts. This semester we received a request for volunteers to judge an elementary school public speaking contest. I expect that the partnership will continue to find new and different ways to utilize this system in order to enhance the learning experience.

***Lorraine Behnan** is a sessional lecturer at the University of Guelph Department of Drama where she teaches the Theatre for Young Audiences and Introduction to Acting courses. She has also been a professional actor. Her previous articles have been published by **Canadian Theatre Review**.*

Why drama for children?

• *Theo Heras* •

Alix Sideris and David Hersh, 1995

Résumé: *David Hersh et Alix Sideris enseignent le théâtre et l'écriture théâtrale aux enfants de la région d'Ottawa et collaborent avec deux troupes, le Théâtre La Salamandre pour les jeunes auditoires et les Jeunes Acteurs d'Orléans. Dans cette entrevue, ils présentent leur approche pédagogique, de la maternelle à l'école secondaire, laquelle vise à favoriser la découverte de soi et la constitution de l'esprit de groupe. Ils examinent la différence entre le texte et le jeu théâtral, présentent le mouvement comme moyen de définir le personnage et, enfin, précisent les aptitudes que développe la pratique du théâtre.*

Abstract: *David Hersh and Alix Sideris teach drama and theatre to children in the Ottawa area, working with two different companies: Salamander Theatre for Young Audiences and Orleans Young Players (OYP). This interview discusses their approach to drama from preschool to high school: it is a means both to individual self-discovery and to group-building. They examine the differences between drama and theatre, discuss movement as a method of finding character, and show how drama develops life-skills.*

Theo Heras: *David, Alix, tell us a little about yourselves. When did you start drama?*

David Hersh: In senior kindergarten. I participated in an after-school program through elementary school, had drama classes in junior high, and took drama all through high school. At Concordia University, I began in Drama, but majored in Drama in Education.

Alix Sideris: I began late. I auditioned in the fifth grade and got the lead role. In seventh and eighth grade I took drama.

Heras: *What attracted you to drama?*

Hersh: Playing. My first instructor was Ilene Cummings, a local actor and parent in the neighbourhood. She introduced creative play or adventure drama — they're two different terms for essentially the same thing. Ilene would give us a scene and a character, or we would choose the scene as a group and pick our own characters, and then we would play. We had lots of furniture in the classroom. We could build a ship or an island and then play within that scene.

Sideris: I fell in love with drama in grade five. In junior high I had an excellent drama teacher, Barbara Gales, at Wilfrid Laurier Junior High in Montreal. She introduced me to the world of drama as opposed to theatre — and also to the world of teaching drama. I found a creative outlet for expressing all of my teenage angst. She gave me a forum, a safe environment for that.

Heras: *Drama was important to the two of you as children. Let's jump right into the big question and perhaps we'll work backwards: Why drama for children?*

Sideris: I believe that drama is inherently therapeutic. Involvement in the creative process opens a path for discovering and understanding one's self.

Hersh: What I like best about drama is that it's social. You interact with other people and work on something together. It's cooperative, it's collective, it's a chance to socialize and there is a lot of group interaction. Drama is also problem-solving; it's creative problem-solving. Drama is about self-discovery, discovering or defining personal space. Drama is about finding out what you are good at. Drama is about risk-taking, putting yourself on the line. It is also group-building. The two go together. When you feel comfortable with the group you are willing to take risks and you grow as an individual.

Heras: *How old do you think children should be before they are introduced to drama?*

Sideris: I've worked with children as young as three. Children start creative play at an early age. The kind of drama you do with a three-year-old is different from the drama you do with a four- or five-year-old. They all have different levels. Teaching drama to the very young is creative play with some rules. That is what drama is: it's creative play and creating boundaries with some rules around it.

Hersh: I worked with three-year-olds at a daycare in Montreal, teaching once a week for forty-five minutes. The younger you are the easier it is to do drama because it's all make-believe, it's still pretend. At the daycare, I used a thematic approach. For example, one day I brought in a pair of shoes and we did things with feet and shoes. We played a lot of foot games and experienced different kinds of foot movement. For example, what would it feel like to be walking in someone else's shoes or walking on the moon, and so on. I would read or tell a story that had to do with the theme and we would act out the story, or take the idea of the story and do it ourselves, or use the foot theme to do something else.

Heras: *How about work with five- to eight-year-olds?*

Hersh: Kids at five or six still have a sense of play. In mixed groups, you can still involve the seven- and eight-year-olds in play. That's where the social element

Salamander Theatre for Young Audiences
Acting Up Workshop

comes in. The success of the class is dependent on the group. As a teacher I have to follow along and find out what the sense of the group is before I can design the program. I go into the first class with a plan and try to assess the class and then try the next day; but things are constantly changing. I find it very difficult to plan a full year. You do, because you say, "This is where I want to start and these are all of the things I want to do." But if the kids have missed B, C and F, you've got to find a way to pick them up. You work with the group and not against it or nothing comes out. Six-, seven- and eight-year-olds usually find their own way.

Heras: *Let's move up the ladder. What about children in mid- grade (grades 5 to 8)?*

Hersh: Mid-grade. It's such an awkward stage for them. Physically they're growing faster. Socially things change. They go from being most important person in the school to being the least important: the whole social scene has changed. Socializing becomes a much greater part of your life. I find that those children who haven't had drama by this age are very self-conscious about how they act. They're also at an age where they are challenging everything. I find it a very difficult age to work with. So what do you do? You want to create a safe environment for them to explore whatever they like and whatever they want. I treat the children respectfully and usually get respect back.

Heras: *I can imagine that body work is very difficult with kids that age not only because they are self-conscious, but also, as you said, because they grow so fast and their bodies are constantly changing.*

Hersh: What I usually do with kids that age is find the fun, find the games, the playing, and make that okay. We focus on games and not on the body. Once the kids discover the fun, they become more comfortable. The problem is that sometimes they don't know when to stop and that's hard to deal with.

Heras: *I'd like to digress a moment. You taught a Shakespeare program this past summer. Can you describe it? What made you decide to do it? How old were the children involved? What play did you do?*

Hersh: The "Scottish" play. It was with Salamander Theatre's program called "Simply Shakespeare." The children were ten to fourteen years old and each got a little bit of script. We learned the rhythm of Shakespeare. We learned the rhythm vocally; we learned the rhythm physically. We talked about Shakespeare's time. We talked a lot about status. A lot of Shakespeare is built on one situation: the king does wrong. What does that mean to the whole hierarchy in the society? We talked about status and about where people's status might be. We played status games.

Heras: *Describe a status game.*

Hersh: Master-Servant. The master says, "Tie my shoes," and the servant ties the shoes. Whatever the master says the servant has to do. Then we reverse the roles so everyone understands both roles. We also use playing cards with numbers one to ten, taking ten as the king and one as the criminal. In a pair, you play the difference. Sometimes one and four are together, sometimes one and eight. We also discovered where the students placed different people in our society in terms of status and that was an interesting social study. For the "Simply Shakespeare" program we discussed Shakespeare's time, but I have since applied the game to modern-day. For example, between one and ten where does a doctor lie? Where is the lawyer? Where is the garbage collector?

Heras: *And where is the actor, David? Did you ask the kids?*

Hersh: No [laugh]. But depending on their age, they would have said different things. Probably high, because they all think of movie stars. What gives people status: money or power? Those are the kinds of questions we explored.

Heras: *It sounds as if you're talking about sociology.*

Hersh: Theatre encompasses everything. We took aspects of Shakespearean theatre and found games and broke it down to what is necessary in it. We followed the story line and looked at themes such as witchcraft and black magic. We played around with the themes. The kids got a lot out of it and were able to recite complete pieces of text.

Heras: *What are you trying to accomplish when you work with children?*

Sideris: Ultimately as a facilitator in drama, I want to create a safe environment where self-exploration is safe and acceptable. Drama provides a forum for kids to learn how to think creatively. That process is inherently therapeutic and enriching and I believe that everyone needs drama in their lives.

Hersh: All of my classes start with and end in a circle where we find out how everyone is doing. It helps to build the group and when you feel comfortable in the group, you're willing to take risks. The circle gives the kids a chance to say, "Oh, I'm feeling like this or I'm feeling like that" and you're accepted by the group for however you feel.

Heras: *That kind of acceptance doesn't happen in many places.*

Hersh: No, it doesn't happen in many places and it doesn't happen naturally even in drama. A group has to feel safe and you have to do exercises that allow the members of the group to feel safe with one another so that they can speak openly. Once you achieve that in the group, then their self-confidence grows. I've had a

lot of parents come up to me and say, "My daughter never used to do this before." Even the kids say it themselves.

Heras: *I know both of you are interested in movement and the physical aspects of drama. Can you talk about the importance of movement?*

Hersh: I do things with personal space — kinespheres. How does my body move inside my space? Everyone finds [his/her] space in the room and then moves inside that space. How high can you go and how low? How far frontward and backward? How fast can you go when you move in your space? We learn where our space is. Everyone else has a space like that. I use physical warm-ups, physical games: statues, freezes, tableaus — those kinds of things. And I use the Laban method.

Heras: *Could you briefly describe the Laban method?*

Sideris: Rudolf Laban was a choreographer who revolutionized dance in the 1940s. David and I apply Laban in drama as an organic way of discovering character and voice. The method was introduced to us by Brian Doubt and Anne Skinner, and we have adapted it to our work with children. In the Laban method, there are eight basic movement characters which are derived from different centres of movement in the body. When you experience these characters organically they become part of your movement vocabulary. It transcends physical ability and can be adapted for people with physical and mental disabilities.

Hersh: Some of my students just loved doing Laban because it was a lot easier for them to find the emotion through a physical route. When you have a class of thirty kids you want to reach everyone at one point so you incorporate different methods of teaching. The students experience something they're comfortable with, and in the process they get to explore and find other methods too and learn to be comfortable with them. All in a safe environment.

Heras: *If this were a perfect world and you could do whatever you wanted to do in terms of drama with children, ideally what would you want to do?*

Sideris: Something very magical happens when someone incorporates drama in [her] curriculum and I'm happy with it just being there. Not everyone is inclined to add it. Salamander Theatre, for example, meets with teachers and helps them develop their drama vocabulary. I'm happy with schools that provide drama classes. Not many do. Instead of having a production at the end of the year, I'd rather see schools offer drama, like art, as part of their curriculum.

Heras: *Discuss the difference between drama and theatre.*

Sideris: Theatre is product-oriented and drama is process-oriented. I have preferred to do the process-oriented programs.

Hersh: My junior high school drama teacher, Elaine Vine, defined drama as developmental and exploring. Theatre is performance.

Heras: *Process is very important to you, David. Could you comment on that?*

Hersh: You know, it's funny. We work for two companies. With Salamander Theatre, we do workshops, so we do no product at all. At Orleans Young Players, the parents are expecting a product. We build skills, but in the end there has to be a product. The older classes at OYP perform for schools and they have to sell the

Members of Encore! Performing ***A Midsummer Night's Dream.*** *Kathleen Frost (top left), Celine (top right), Jamie Dee Franklin (bottom left), Jen Jarvis (bottom right).*

show so there's a financial element to it. The road to the product is the process and I can emphasize that. Process is important because it encompasses the exploration, the development: all those steps along the way make it the kids' own experience. But I've begun to enjoy working toward an end product. Initially we can focus on process, the building work, and then we can use those tools to make something together.

Heras: *This leads us to talk about Encore! This theatre company was your initiative. You went with the idea to Karen Freeborn, Artistic Director at Orleans Young Players.*

Hersh: Yes, I borrowed the idea from my grade 13 drama program called Theatre 55 at Oakwood Collegiate Institute in Toronto and Mr. Bob Beatty, my teacher there. I started to think about doing this kind of program while I was working with older kids last year. We were supposed to produce "A Midsummer Night's Dream" with two classes. I had thirty kids and a play with 22 roles, eight of which were fairies. A majority of the kids were going to be fairies and this was after twenty weeks of classes! I thought, this doesn't work. The first thing I did was split up the classes into two plays. The older class did "A Midsummer Night ..." but I had fourteen girls in the class. So now I have a play with most of the roles male. But I have females. Maybe we should have done a play that had all female roles so that they could have played their gender. With those kinds of concerns in mind, I went to Karen Freeborn and *Encore!* came to be. The program has been initiated for kids who are interested in pursuing theatre or who really like doing theatre and want to experience it more fully. Karen liked the idea. This added a new dimension to OYP's program, taking it a step further. In early July 1996, we held auditions for twelve- to eighteen-year-old kids. We selected ten young people.

Heras: *How did you promote it?*

Hersh: The promotion was directed to students of Orleans Young Players. In

Encore! they would be involved in all aspects of the theatre. *Encore!* has a season of three shows. Everyone is guaranteed a significant acting part in one of the shows. The plays reflect the group, which is made up of eight females and two males. The season is a mix of three different genres: drama, comedy and suspense.

Heras: *What are the plays?*

Hersh: "The Children's Hour," by Lillian Hellman is the first play we'll be doing in December; "Clue in the Fast Lane," by Beverly Cooper and Anne Marie MacDonald is the comedy we'll produce in March; and the third play is "I'll Be Back before Midnight," a thriller, by Peter Colley. The plays incorporate three different styles of theatre: "The Children's Hour" is realistic. It's a time piece. We're setting in the early 1940s. The kids have to find period costumes and all the set designs have to reflect that period. The second play, "Clue in the Fast Lane," is not as realistic. It moves from the car to people's houses to nightclubs — it moves all over the place — so the set is going to be totally different and need a special kind of design. The costumes and props will also be different. The third play, "I'll Be Back before Midnight," has a lot of technical effects in it. The set has to be precise. There are explosions and there are fights with axes. There are blocking details. The script actually comes with a guide on how to produce the special effects. With the three plays we have a variety of theatre production and experience.

Heras: *What do members of the company do?*

Hersh: There are lots of things to think about. At company meetings we initially talked about what jobs there are in the theatre and who would be doing those jobs: designers — including props, costumes, sets, lights, sound, program and tickets; builders — making or finding costumes, building the sets or finding the pieces, putting the set up, focusing the lights — doing all of the technical things. The kids are also in charge of promotion — selling tickets and subscriptions. The company is financially responsible. The kids have to make sure that tickets get sold. They're also in charge of front-of-house: who's ushering, what are the ticket prices, when to start the show — how many people to wait for; keep reservations, keep all the tickets, all the subscriptions; sales — keep all those records; refreshment sales at intermission — food and drink, etc. The front-of-house person is in charge of all of that. Then there's stage management. The stage manager looks after the play once it's up. In this case, the stage manager is also the assistant director. It's not usually the case, but I gave the assistant director a scene to direct. I believe that when you do theatre, the more you understand about the complete production process, the better off you are.

Heras: *Can you explain?*

Hersh: For example, the more you know about lighting as an actor, the easier it is for you to find the hot spot in the light. Some actors don't know those things and just act and forget about everyone else. But a play may include four or five other actors and there are maybe thirty other people creating the piece and it's nice to be aware of what everyone is doing and how it's done. The kids are acting in the plays as well. One of the things that I do is develop individual acting techniques for finding character.

Heras: *The students are also learning acting.*

Hersh: Not just acting — both acting and techniques. They're learning how to find character. [In] some of the plays I've cast opposite to type so that the kids can experience something different ... Because that's the whole thing! Encore! has two components: It's a functioning company that has to make money so that it can run; and as well, it's a learning theatre company — people are doing it to learn. To give them non-challenging parts isn't learning. I give them challenges.

Heras: *I find it interesting that there is this financial responsibility as well. It's no longer fun and games but a serious endeavour. . .*

Hersh: Well, that's the thing. Besides everything else, it's running a company. That's a whole process too. It's all making something work.

Heras: *The emphasis here is on* company, *not theatre.*

Hersh: A lot of people don't know that. In the theatre scene now in order for actors to work, they often have to form their own company. People go into it not knowing all the different elements involved. A thirteen-year-old in Encore! now knows what it means to run a production company and to be responsible for it. It's learning life skills. As a teacher of drama and a director, I am able to develop skills, take part in the creative process with kids, watch them grow and have loads of fun doing it. It's the perfect work for me.

Heras: *Thank you very much.*

***David Hersh** and **Alix Sideris** both graduated with degrees in Drama in Education from Concordia. Now married, they live in the Ottawa area with their eighteen-month-old daughter, Hannah. David has directed for Encore! and for Orleans Young Players and Salamander Theatre. Alix is a co-founder of How 'bout us!/Moondragon Interactive Clowning Company. She co-wrote and directed "Aurora Awakes" for Windsor Women's Festival (95). Both David and Alix have played a variety of roles in community theatre; clowned with Prospero's Fools in Windsor; studied at Bread and Puppet Theatre, Vermont, with Peter Schumann; and lectured at the University of Windsor.*

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A Literary Event? La Bonne Femme *by Jasmine Dubé/Un événement littéraire?* La Bonne Femme *de Jasmine Dubé*

• *Daniel Chouinard* •

Last Fall, at the Soirée des Masques, the two-year old and highly prestigious awards show for Quebec theatre, something quite unexpected happened. This was not one of those usual surprises at gala evenings when an unlikely "underdog" or "ugly duckling" steals a coveted trophy, but an event bordering on scandal. Scandal would the right word since the more or less implicit hierarchy underlying the literary and theatrical milieu was, during some of the highlights of the ceremony, questioned, challenged, if not permanently overturned. That evening a play for young audiences of four to eight-year old children — *La Bonne Femme* (*The Old Woman*), written and performed by Jasmine Dubé, staged by Martin Faucher, and produced by Théâtre Bouches décousues — won three awards. One of the three awards, the Masque for the best production for children, does not change anything since this recognition simply underscores the status of the work — a play for younger audiences. The other two, two of the most coveted Masques, those for the best new play and best direction are the reason why such an achievement may become a literary event. However, the real upset does not stem from the fact that Jasmine Dubé deprived the "hot" playright Michel-Marc Boucher of his award — to quote Ray Conlogue from the *Globe and Mail*- — or that Martin Faucher in some way humiliated Robert Lepage and Carbone 14, but from the very fact that a new "establishment", the Academy of Quebec Scenic Arts, considered theatre for children and the other, "real" theatre — meant for the real audiences of adults at large and the educated elite, and belonging to the realm of serious Literature — as unquestionably equals. As the winner explained in an interview given last February to *Le Devoir*, 1) "children's theatre is neither jet-set nor glamour and, of course, does not generate profits," 2) young audiences will never be considered like real audiences "since they don't hold economic power," 3) playrights wishing to create for children must face up to an insidious but rampant institutional censorship, and 4), lastly, "shows for children develop formal research as innovative as the other theatre's"! What professional working for younger audiences could not repeat those grievances? All in all, the Soirée des Masques may have only wanted to do credit to an exceptional play and produc-

tion but, unknowingly, it may have started to make amends for the traditional neglect and contempt manifested toward shows for children. To Jasmine Dubé's complete surprise, that evening, her work had gained a legitimacy and a status comparable to Michel Tremblay's. Such a comparison is totally relevant since the latter, like so many serious authors, actors and producers, got his career spark watching a children's show staged by Paul Buissonneau's La Roulotte!

L'automne dernier, au Gala des Masques, il s'est produit, on s'en souviendra, non pas une de ces surprises normales sinon attendues dans ces soirées de remise de prix, mais bien quelque chose qui au touche au scandale. En effet, ce fut bien une espèce de scandale en ce sens que la hiérarchie plus ou moins implicite des milieux théâtral et littéraire s'est vue, aux moments forts de la cérémonie, contestée, voire renversée et, peut-être à long terme, remise en question. Une pièce pour l'enfance, *La Bonne Femme*, écrite et jouée par Jasmine Dubé, mise en scène par Martin Faucher et produite par le Théâtre Bouches décousues, a mérité trois Masques: d'abord, celui de la production de l'année pour jeunes publics, ce qui, en soi, ne bouleverse rien, puisque cette reconnaissance ne fait que confiner l'oeuvre à son propre domaine; ensuite, et c'est ici que s'est passé ce qui pourrait devenir un événement littéraire, deux des prix les plus prestigieux, celui du meilleur texte original et celui de la meilleure mise en scène. Or, la "secousse" ne vient pas du fait que Jasmine Dubé ait damé le pion à Pierre-Marc Bouchard ou que Martin Faucher ait joué un tour à Carbone 14 et à Robert Lepage mais bien que devant l'élite et le grand public, un nouvel "establishment", c'est-à-dire l'Académie du monde de la scène du Québec, ait mis à égalité le théâtre pour la jeunesse et l'autre, l'authentique, destiné au seul public qui compte, celui des adultes et des gens cultivés, et reconnu comme appartenant de soi à la Littérature. Comme l'expliquait la lauréate dans une entrevue accordée au *Devoir* le 16 février dernier, 1) "cette forme de théâtre — celle dite pour les enfants — n'est ni jet-set ni glamour et, bien sûr, elle n'est pas payante" (p. B-3); 2) le "jeune public" n'est jamais considéré comme un vrai public, car il n'a pas le pouvoir économique; 3) les auteurs pour la jeunesse font face à une censure institutionnelle, insidieuse mais omniprésente; 4) et, surtout, la plupart des critiques ignorent que "ce théâtre fait preuve de recherches formelles aussi innovatrices que l'autre théâtre!" (*Ibid.*). Ces doléances, qui, dans le milieu de la scène pour l'enfance et l'adolescence, ne pourrait les reprendre à son compte? C'est peut-être autant une oeuvre et une production exceptionnelles que voulait honorer la soirée des Masques, qu'un mépris et un oubli qu'elle cherchait à réparer. En l'espace de deux heures, Jasmine Dubé acquérait une légitimité et un statut comparables à ceux de Michel Tremblay à ses débuts. Le couronnement de *La Bonne Femme*, s'il contribue à briser durablement la barrière entre les "deux théâtres", aura vraiment été un événement littéraire et non un "coup de théâtre" médiatique. Après tout, pour finir avec une boutade, combien de dramaturges, de comédiens et de metteurs en scène doivent le choc de leur vocation à la Roulotte de Paul Buissonneau ou à *la Boîte à surprises*? Demandez-le à Michel Tremblay...

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Identification et thérapie: l'emploi du journal intime dans le roman pour adolescentes au Québec

• *Daniela Di Cecco* •

Summary: *D. Di Cecco analyzes the use of private diary in four novels by M. Marineau, S. Desrosiers and D. Demers. This literary device has many functions. It enables the authors to explore the tension between private and public space (family background vs social obligations), examine the difficult mother-daughter relationship, and study the identity problems of the diarists, torn between a conflictual personal context and the new — but often contradictory— social role of women.*

Résumé: *Cet article analyse l'emploi du journal intime dans quatre romans pour adolescent(e)s de M. Marineau, S. Desrosiers et D. Demers. Ce mode d'écriture remplit plusieurs fonctions: il permet d'approfondir la tension entre espace privé (la famille) et espace public (le monde extérieur), d'explorer la difficile relation mère-fille et, enfin, d'examiner les problèmes identitaires des rédactrices, déchirées entre une situation émotive conflictuelle et le nouveau rôle social des femmes, souvent contradictoire en soi.*

Selon Alain Girard, "La jeunesse est le moment privilégié du journal. Un être s'y interroge sur lui-même et son avenir" (76). Cette constatation est tirée de son livre *Le Journal intime et la notion de personne* (1963), la première des nombreuses analyses qui soulignent le lien entre cette pratique d'écriture et l'adolescence. Ce rapport entre l'âge de l'intimiste et la forme choisie est souvent associé à l'aspect "féminin" du journal, attribuable en partie au fait qu'au 19ème siècle, époque où est né le journal intime tel que nous le connaissons, ce dernier était considéré un des modes d'expression supposément non littéraires socialement acceptables pour les femmes. Dans son article "Women and Diaries: Gender and Genre" (1983), Valerie Raoul nous rappelle que la jeune fille qui écrit tous les jours dans un beau cahier neuf est considérée comme l'intimiste par excellence; c'est le modèle évoqué par plusieurs auteurs au début de leur journal, quel que soit leur sexe. Philippe Lejeune confirme également ce modèle dans son étude des journaux de jeune fille du siècle dernier, *Le Moi des demoiselles* (1993).

Dans les romans actuels pour la jeunesse, ce stéréotype reconnaissable, loin d'être renié, est repris et adapté puisque des intimistes-adolescentes figurent assez souvent parmi les personnages. Plusieurs romans publiés récemment dans

des collections pour adolescent(e)s au Québec illustrent l'emploi du journal intime. Les exemples dont je parlerai ici sont: *Cassiopée ou l'Été polonais* (1988) et sa suite, *L'Été des baleines* (1989) de Michèle Marineau, *Les Cahiers d'Élisabeth* (1990) de Sylvie Desrosiers et *Les grands sapins ne meurent pas* (1993), deuxième tome de la trilogie Marie-Lune, de Dominique Demers. Tous ces romans, écrits par des femmes pour des adolescentes, ont comme principale protagoniste une jeune fille qui se confie à son journal. L'intérêt de ces textes réside dans le portrait que donnent ces jeunes filles d'une adolescente moderne. Comme les "demoiselles" du 19ème siècle dans l'étude de Lejeune, la nouvelle jeune fille fait face au monde adulte, à un nouveau rôle de femme; mais elle est consciente, davantage que ses précurseurs, qu'"on ne naît pas femme, on le devient" (S. de Beauvoir) et elle reçoit des messages conflictuels sur ce qu'"être femme" veut dire[1].

Contrairement au vrai journal intime où l'auteur écrit "au jour le jour" et principalement pour lui-même, il s'agit dans ces romans de journaux *fictifs*. L'auteure, adulte et romancière, écrit au nom d'une jeune fille intimiste fictive. La romancière raconte la vie d'une autre, sans "pacte autobiographique". Contrairement au véritable intimiste, la romancière écrit toujours pour un lecteur (ou, dans ce cas, une lectrice), même si la narratrice est censée écrire pour elle-même (voir Raoul 1980, 3). Ceci peut poser des problèmes de vraisemblance; le journal risque de paraître "truqué". La relation entre auteure, protagoniste et lectrice est ambivalente. Il peut s'agir d'un regard nostalgique (nécessairement autobiographique) vers l'adolescence de l'auteure, qui raconte ses propres expériences — ce qui est souvent le cas dans le roman pour adultes. Par contre, comme il est question ici de romans publiés dans des collections pour jeunes, l'auteure peut aussi jouer le rôle de l'adulte (la mère) qui essaie d'aider ses lectrices (ses enfants) à traverser une étape incertaine et difficile de leur vie. La fonction didactique de la forme du journal est souvent exploitée; tout en déléguant la parole à la jeune fille, l'auteure transmet certains messages aux lectrices. Si l'auteure a des enfants, elle peut s'identifier au parent. Ainsi, une relation maternelle s'installe entre l'auteure adulte et la lectrice adolescente.

Souvent, dans des romans écrits sous forme de journal, l'imitation du genre proprement dit reste superficielle. Parfois la narration à la première personne et la fragmentation des entrées, introduites par la date, sont les seuls traits empruntés au vrai journal. Les romans retenus illustrent différents niveaux de mimétisme par rapport au vrai journal. Dans les romans de Marineau, les dates des entrées se font rares; ce sont surtout les références dans ce texte au "beau cahier bleu à petits carreaux" qui nous rappellent qu'il s'agit d'un journal[2]. La distance entre le personnage-narratrice et elle-même comme protagoniste peut varier. Par exemple, dans *Cassiopée ou l'Été polonais*, au moment où Cassiopée trouve enfin que sa vie est devenue assez intéressante pour l'écrire au moment où elle la vit, elle commence à parler d'elle-même en tant qu'héroïne à la troisième personne et au passé simple. Elle raconte sa fugue ainsi:

> Écrivons donc ... [...]. Ce matin-là, après une nuit d'insomnie entrecoupée de rêves aussi bizarres qu'incongrus, notre héroïne sauta du lit aussitôt sa mère partie pour le bureau. Avec sa grâce et sa délicatesse habituelles, elle eut tôt fait de se vêtir d'habits discrets et de bon goût, destinés à n'éveiller aucun soupçon.

> Il ne fallait surtout pas qu'on la confondît (confondât? confondisse? confondasse?) avec une vulgaire fugueuse. Puis, sa petite valise à la main et le sourire aux lèvres, elle s'élança d'un pas léger et féminin vers l'arrêt d'autobus le plus proche. (77-78)

Après cet épisode "romanesque" et ironique, elle revient au "je" et au passé composé, temps plus familier dans le journal.

Dans *Cassiopée ou l'Été polonais* et sa suite, *L'Été des baleines*, le journal occupe tout le roman. Dans les deux autres exemples, par contre, le journal ne constitue qu'une partie du récit. Dominique Demers intègre au roman *Les grands sapins ne meurent pas*, trois entrées du journal de la narratrice, Marie-Lune, qui, à l'âge de quinze ans, fait face à la fois à la mort de sa mère et à une grossesse non voulue. Les fragments de son journal sont mis en italiques. Dans le cas du roman de Sylvie Desrosiers, les cahiers d'Élisabeth occupent quatre chapitres sur onze, intitulés "Journal intime 1,2,3 et 4". Ces entrées, qui semblent imiter un journal intime du 19ème siècle, seront lues par une autre adolescente, Marie-Soleil. Celle-ci joue en effet le rôle de la lectrice moderne, faisant des commentaires critiques à partir d'une perspective contemporaine. Les récits de vie des deux personnages alternent, pour se rejoindre vers la fin du roman. Cette combinaison de deux voix narratives intercalées dans le roman de Desrosiers n'existe pas dans un vrai journal, ce qui souligne le fait qu'il s'agit ici d'un roman et non pas d'un vrai journal intime. Les trois fonctions remplies dans un journal par une seule personne — narrateur, auteur et lecteur — peuvent être séparées dans le roman.

Pour faciliter la lecture et encourager la lectrice à poursuivre le récit, le découpage en chapitres courts est une pratique courante dans le roman pour adolescentes. Dans le roman écrit sous forme de journal, les entrées deviennent donc une façon de diviser le récit en courts épisodes. De plus, dans un roman qui mêle à la narration des fragments de journal, les entrées dispersées dans le récit créent un effet de suspens qui suscite chez la lectrice le désir d'en savoir davantage. Dans *Les Cahiers d'Élisabeth*, chaque entrée du journal nous renseigne un peu plus sur l'accident qui laisse la jeune fille "clouée" dans son lit. Le chapitre deux, intitulé "Journal intime 1" se termine ainsi: "Pourtant je ne l'ai pas cherché. Je n'ai pas fait exprès. Martin non plus, c'est certain. Car il ne savait pas que l'arme était chargée" (33). Il faut attendre encore une vingtaine de pages avant d'apprendre la suite.

Les motivations qui sous-tendent le journal intime attribuées aux personnages-narrateurs sont nombreuses et reprennent les clichés de l'intimisme. Sylvie Desrosiers intègre presque tous les éléments typiques dans le journal d'Élisabeth: l'amour, l'ennui, la séparation et la souffrance. Le vrai journal est dicté par un besoin de communication et sert de moyen de surmonter la solitude. Le roman sous forme de journal, par contre, représente cette situation en l'analysant. Béatrice Didier résume ainsi le rôle classique du journal intime comme confident:

> Des générations d'adolescents ont tenu un journal parce qu'il leur semblait qu'ils débordaient d'idées, de sentiments et que personne n'était capable de les comprendre ou simplement les écouter. (17)

Dans les romans que nous étudions, l'écriture de l'intimiste-adolescente est le plus souvent l'indice d'un malaise plus spécifique, relié aux rapports entre

l'adolescente et sa mère. Pourtant, l'utilisation du journal comme moyen pour mettre en relief l'absence de communication entre mère et fille est en contradiction avec les origines mêmes du "journal de jeune fille", d'après Philippe Lejeune. Les jeunes filles du 19ème siècle entreprenaient souvent leur journal sur le conseil de leur mère, qui en faisait la lecture (Lejeune 1993, 19).

Dans *Les grands sapins ne meurent pas*, le lien entre le journal et la mère est illustré à deux niveaux. D'abord, l'adolescente choisit d'écrire dans un cahier fleuri que sa mère lui avait offert quelques années avant sa mort. De plus, cette jeune fille enceinte donne à son journal le titre "Lettres à mon foetus". L'absence de sa mère, qu'elle considérait comme sa meilleure amie, et ses sentiments face à son propre statut de future mère, provoquent en quelque sorte l'écriture intimiste. Avouant qu'elle ne veut pas être mère, mais qu'elle en a besoin d'une, elle écrit dans son cahier:

> Ce n'est pas facile d'être enceinte et en désastre en même temps. Fernande me manque. Terriblement. Si tu savais ce que je donnerais pour qu'elle me prenne dans ses bras. (91)

Dans le roman contemporain pour adolescent(e)s, les parents sont souvent absents (morts, partis) ou relégués au second plan. Ceci permet à l'auteur(e) de privilégier les sentiments du protagoniste. Cependant, dans la plupart des romans pour adolescentes écrits par des femmes, la mère, présente ou absente, joue un rôle important dans la quête identitaire de sa fille.

Le rapport entre la mère et la fille est central dans le journal de Cassiopée, héroïne des romans de Michèle Marineau. Le récit, et donc le journal intime, se déclenche quand elle découvre que sa mère divorcée a un nouvel ami.

> Pourtant, la semaine avait bien commencé. Enfin, comme d'habitude. Mais hier, jeudi si vous voulez savoir, ça s'est gâté. Un test de maths pourri, un feu sauvage en préparation [...] une chicane avec Suzie. Et, pour finir le plat, ma mère est en amour. (*Cassiopée*, 11)

Se sentant abandonnée par sa mère, qui est trop préoccupée par sa propre histoire, Cassiopée confie à son cahier ses troubles face à ses premières expériences sexuelles ou à sa solitude, tout en essayant d'oublier son mal en "s'empiffrant" de pizzas et de lectures. Elle écrit: "Je vais peut-être finir par faire une indigestion de pizzas ou une indigestion de Jules Verne. Maman pourrait en profiter pour se rappeler que j'existe" (*Cassiopée*, 51-52). L'adolescente de Marineau, comme Catherine Pozzi dans un vrai journal de la fin du 19ème siècle, illustre le sentiment d'être unique et enfermée dans sa solitude[3]. Dans *L'Été des baleines*, le rapport entre Cassiopée et sa mère évolue. Comme elles sont toutes les deux amoureuses, la mère devient en quelque sorte la complice de sa fille. L'adolescente, par contre, n'est pas toujours à l'aise dans cette relation d'égale à égale:

> Mais qu'est-ce qui lui prend, à ma mère, de jouer les mères cool et compréhensives? Pourquoi elle ne me sort pas son numéro de mère inquiète, protectrice, un peu sévère? [...] il me semble que ce serait plus facile. (*L'Été*, 106)

La réaction de la jeune fille illustre un des paradoxes de l'adolescence, exprimé ainsi par la psychanalyste Françoise Dolto:

> On aurait besoin de sentir l'intérêt de l'entourage familial pour cette évolution incroyable qui se passe en nous, mais quand cet intérêt se manifeste, il peut nous retenir dans l'enfance ou au contraire nous pousser trop vite à devenir adulte. Dans les deux sens, on se sent coincé par cette attention alors qu'on aurait cherché à être soutenu. (16)

Le roman de Michèle Marineau communique la perspective de la mère à travers une lettre à sa fille. Cette même technique est employée par Dominique Demers dans *Un hiver de tourmente* (1992), le premier tome de la série Marie-Lune. Dans ces deux romans, l'histoire de la mère — une mère présentée en tant que sujet désirant — est articulée en contrepoint à celle de la fille. Contrairement au roman de Demers, où l'absence de la mère rend la vie de l'adolescente plus difficile, dans les romans de Marineau, la communication entre Cassiopée et sa mère n'est pas bloquée. La mère soutient sa fille et lui fait confiance. Le point de vue des mères permet à l'auteure adulte de s'exprimer. Michèle Marineau, mère de deux enfants, avoue avoir écrit *Cassiopée ou l'Été polonais*:

> [...] pour l'adolescente que j'étais [et...] pour ces adolescents que j'aurai un jour [...]. Et s'ils me trouvent vraiment horrible, peut-être découvriront-ils, en lisant ce roman, que leur mère n'est pas si mal après tout. (Demers 1989, D-2)

Dans *Les Cahiers d'Élisabeth* de Sylvie Desrosiers, il s'agit moins d'une difficulté de communication entre la mère et la fille que d'un conflit entre l'adolescente et ses deux parents. Même si ce roman reprend les clichés de l'écriture intimiste, rappelant un journal de jeune fille du siècle dernier, le cahier d'Élisabeth a tout du journal "anti-institutionnel" typique de l'adolescent d'aujourd'hui; celui que Lejeune désigne comme "le lieu où l'on construit son identité contre les parents, l'école [...]". (Lejeune 1993, 19). Élisabeth déclame:

> Je n'en veux pas de leur petit bonheur! De leur photocopie trop pâle du bonheur. J'ai de la difficulté à croire que mes parents aient pu s'aimer, comme moi et Martin on s'aime. (77-78)

Plus loin, elle s'identifie à sa mère, qu'elle plaint d'avoir à supporter un mari aussi autoritaire. A l'inverse de la relation complice entre la mère et la fille illustrée dans les romans de Demers et de Marineau, la mère dans ce roman devient pour la fille un modèle à éviter.

> Comment ma mère fait pour vivre avec un homme dont elle a peur? Moi, je partirai bien un jour, mais elle? [...]. Personne ne me dominera, surtout pas mon père. Car en me gardant prisonnière, il me perdra à tout jamais. (108)

Se remettant d'un accident, Élisabeth est enfermée dans sa chambre, son père lui ayant interdit de voir son ami, responsable de l'accident. Le personnage rappelle une princesse de conte de fées, enfermée dans sa tour, lorsqu'elle soupire: "Oh comme je voudrais dormir! Dormir jusqu'à dix-huit ans" (49). L'image de cette jeune fille impuissante, renfermée, qui rappelle la condition sociale des jeunes filles du siècle dernier, est renforcée par sa juxtaposition avec celle d'une autre adolescente, Marie-Soleil, qui jouit d'une liberté totale pendant l'absence de ses parents. Chose intéressante, si cette dernière jeune fille ne se gêne pas pour lire le journal d'une autre, elle n'en tient pas un elle-même, par crainte

que sa mère (qui a la mauvaise habitude de fouiller dans ses tiroirs) ne le trouve et le lise "sous prétexte de mieux [la] comprendre [...]" (24).

L'étude de Lejeune souligne le principal dilemme de la femme au 19ème siècle: "accepter le mariage ou tenter une autre route vers une existence plus personnelle" (1993, 11) à un époque où les autres routes étaient rares et nécessairement perçues comme des détours. Les journaux fictifs attribués à des adolescentes modernes illustrent, à première vue, les bénéfices de l'émancipation féminine; pourtant, on rencontre toujours la même tension centrale entre l'amour (la famille, le privé) et le travail (le public, le monde extérieur) (Raoul 1989, 61). La difficulté qu'éprouvent les jeunes filles d'aujourd'hui, par rapport à celles du siècle dernier, ou même à celles d'il y a vingt ans, est exprimée par Mary Pipher, dans son étude *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* (1994). Pipher prétend que les adolescentes sont, d'une certaine façon, plus opprimées aujourd'hui que par le passé, puisqu'elles grandissent à l'intérieur d'une culture violente et saturée par les médias (12). Les messages culturels qu'elles reçoivent sont brouillés: atteindre l'âge adulte implique un rejet de la passivité et de la dépendance mais le modèle de l'individu autonome est viril tandis que celui de la femme reste fragile; elle doit être mince, belle et vulnérable tout en revendiquant son autonomie et son individualité propre. Comme le résume Yvonne Knibiehler:

> Elles [les adolescentes] se cherchent, comme tous les adolescents, mais elles cherchent, en plus, au fond d'elles-mêmes, les signes d'une féminité qui n'est plus définie. La société de consommation ne leur propose aucune voie tracée, aucun modèle de référence, hormis ceux des magazines de mode. Les conditionnements auxquels elles sont soumises leur laissent l'illusion d'une totale et angoissante liberté. (244)

Les jeunes filles de notre époque se trouvent prises entre deux modèles, l'ancien et le nouveau, et apprennent donc qu'il est impossible d'être un sujet à part entière tout en restant "féminin". Contre ce schéma réactionnaire, l'indépendance que prône le féminisme est attirante, mais elle demeure difficile à atteindre, car elle est concurrencée par les rêves de roman à l'eau de rose, toujours bien ancrés dans notre culture.

La tension entre ces deux modèles, l'ancien et le nouveau, est illustrée dans le journal de Cassiopée, qui rêve de "découvrir des cités perdues [...] explorer les mers lointaines" (*Cassiopée*, 15-16) et désire, en même temps, être aimée:

> Je voudrais être amoureuse. Je voudrais me faire dire que je suis belle, fine, intelligente, drôle. Je voudrais me serrer contre un garçon qui me dirait que mes cheveux sentent bon. Est-ce que c'est trop demander? (*Cassiopée*, 70)[4]

En gardant sa demi-soeur cadette pendant une dizaine de jours, l'adolescente met en question son instinct maternel et le rôle de la femme au foyer:

> J'ai l'impression d'être dans un cocon hors du temps et de l'espace, depuis que je garde Amélie. C'est comme si l'univers tout entier n'était plus que cette petite bonne femme qui sourit [...]. Nous sommes ensemble tout le temps, nous ne voyons personne d'autre [...]. Je ne sais pas si j'ai hâte que se terminent ces dix

jours avec Amélie ou si, au contraire, je voudrais qu'ils ne finissent jamais. (*L'Été*, 31-32)

Le choix entre la maternité et une carrière est le thème central du roman de Dominique Demers. Enceinte à quinze ans, la protagoniste se sent prisonnière de son ventre. Elle s'explique à son copain, qui envisage déjà une vie de famille:

> Je veux être journaliste ... [...]. Je veux faire des grands reportages en Afrique et en Amérique latine. Me vois-tu interviewer les descendants mayas avec un bébé dans les bras? (22)

L'adolescente finit par donner son bébé en adoption. Néanmoins, le schéma traditionnel de la femme-nourrice si bien enraciné dans notre culture complique nécessairement sa décision:

> L'idée d'accoucher et de garder le bébé sonne un peu mieux, mais c'est ce que je désire le moins. Je rêve d'un bébé depuis ma première poupée. Mais dans mon rêve j'ai décidé d'avoir un enfant. (34)

Cependant, malgré sa décision de poursuivre une carrière, la série est bouclée à la fin du troisième tome (*Ils dansent dans la tempête*) par l'image d'une Marie-Lune comblée: amoureuse, mariée, de nouveau enceinte, mais devenue écrivaine. La combinaison parfaite d'une carrière avec une vie de famille — le travail chez soi — illustre une modernisation d'un dénouement traditionnel. Est-ce le rêve du conte de fées à la mode des années quatre-vingt-dix?

Les romans de Demers, Desrosiers et Marineau illustrent les contradictions de l'adolescence féminine: l'indépendance voulue fait contraste avec l'état amoureux prescrit et difficile à abandonner. La réussite et l'autosuffisance restent des qualités associées au refus de l'enfance et de la féminité; donc le dilemme de la jeune fille n'est pas pour autant résolu. Elle doit affronter des choix et relever des défis, tout en acceptant les exigences et les contraintes que la société lui impose.

Dans ces romans, l'écriture intime devient publique: le journal est écrit pour être lu. D'une part, l'emploi du journal intime dans le roman pour adolescentes facilite une identification de la lectrice à la situation de la narratrice, car il correspond à une tendance actuelle chez les filles de tenir un journal. Dans son article, "Ils écrivent, elles écrivent ..." Philippe Lejeune constate que 22% de filles entre 15 et 19 ans tiennent un journal. Le fait que ces jeunes lectrices-intimistes veulent s'identifier à des personnages-modèles dans leurs lectures est souligné par Martine Burgos:

> [...] le désir d'identification des jeunes se porte spontanément plutôt vers les personnages les plus immédiatement utiles au renforcement de l'image de soi, à la structuration de leur personnalité [...]. (40)

L'impact des livres écrits sous forme de journal est illustré plusieurs fois dans "*Cher cahier ...*" (1989) de Philippe Lejeune. Une jeune fille de 14 ans, par exemple, avoue avoir commencé son journal en partie à cause de "l'influence de certains livres et films où le jeune homme ou la jeune fille tient un journal intime" (59). D'autre part, en donnant une voix à l'adolescente-intimiste, les auteures de

ces romans proposent le journal comme une méthode d'analyse, voire de thérapie qui permet de voir plus clair. Comme le dit Cassiopée: "Peut-être que, de l'écrire, ça va m'aider à comprendre" (*L'Été*, 134). Dans *Les grands sapins ne meurent pas*, c'est à travers l'écriture que l'héroïne fait face à son dilemme et examine ses choix et ses sentiments. Cette fonction thérapeutique du journal est exploitée par le projet "Vivre et l'écrire" en France qui propose aux adolescents troublés de leur envoyer leur journal, leur offrant la possibilité d'entamer par la suite une correspondance avec un adulte qui pourra les aider (voir Givenchy, 67-68).

Dans ces romans, la fonction didactique ou thérapeutique du journal et du roman peut être plus ou moins camouflée. Chez Marineau, par exemple, l'adolescente est représentée avec une certaine ironie. Son récit de vie révèle beaucoup d'humour envers ses propres déboires, et le roman en devient plus divertissant à lire. Par contre, dans le roman de Demers, le ton reste sérieux, le conflit angoissant, les problèmes de l'adolescente sont représentés sans aucun humour. Cependant, l'intrigue du roman écrit sous forme de journal est le plus souvent déclenchée par une crise d'identité qui doit être résolue à l'intérieur du récit (Raoul 1980, 30). La fin de la crise et la solution des problèmes peuvent rassurer la lectrice qui vit des expériences semblables ou qui a simplement besoin de se sentir moins seule dans sa propre quête d'identité.

Notes

1 Les romans de Demers, Desrosiers et Marineau, qui véhiculent des valeurs socioculturelles de façon assez consciente, les placent dans un contexte nord-américain spécifique. La comparaison entre ce type de représentation de la crise identitaire de l'adolescente avec celle que l'on trouve dans le roman français (en France) fera l'objet d'une étude plus approfondie.

2 Marineau commence son deuxième roman, *L'Été des baleines*, par une entrée dans le journal de l'adolescente. C'est un moyen efficace de communiquer rapidement les événements du premier roman, tout en faisant avancer le récit.

3 Par exemple, dans son journal de jeunesse, Catherine Pozzi constate: "Personne ne me comprendrait ... pas même maman!! [...]. Personne ne saura jamais ce que sont les douloureuses, les terribles angoisses d'un coeur de jeune fille. Si on me voit pleurer, on ne comprendra pas pourquoi je pleure. Si on me voit rêver, on croira que je pense à mon piano, ou mon chien, ou ma nouvelle robe. — La jeune fille est un être seul" (cité dans Lejeune 1993, 273-274).

4 La ressemblance entre cette constatation et celle que l'on trouve dans le vrai journal de Mireille de Bondeli, qui date de 1907, est frappante: "Je voudrais être adorée, adorée à genoux, si ce n'était un sacrilège, aimée de toute la force d'un homme droit et loyal. Et l'aimer lui-même, jusqu'à en oublier ma personnalité" (cité dans Lejeune 1993, 258).

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Fractured Families

Two Weeks, Twice a Year. Colin Thomas. Scirocco Drama, 1994. 95 pp. $12.95 paper. ISBN 0-9697261-5-5.

Few children today are untouched by the impact of divorce. If they don't experience it directly, they have friends or classmates who do. When a family fractures, children must negotiate the disruption on their own terms . Time becomes divided into "life before" and "life after" the divorce, and time often continues to be divided between parents and between homes. In Thomas's play, *Two Weeks , Twice a Year,* the rift in time, space and contact caused by divorce is vividly manifested. Thomas invites the audience to witness the struggle involved in getting beyond alienating emotional injuries so that people can move forward in relationships.

Through the divorce experience, every character in the play has lost connection with the others. The central character, "Joe," is split into two characters: Joe at six (Gogo) and Joe at twelve. The two Joes are visible only to each other and interact in the privacy of their room like siblings. This device is explained to the audience early in the play. The interplay between the two enables Joe's private concerns to be visible to the audience so they can see how past events and memories affect present thoughts and actions.

Joe, at twelve, is the dreamer struggling with the turmoil of adolescence. His mother can do no right and his father's past transgressions are forgotten or excused. He is consumed with the half-remembered promise of being allowed to live with his Dad when he gets older. Each scene builds the dramatic tension of the play to the moment when he asks his father if he can live with him.

Gogo, at six, has remained the age he was when his parents split up. Functioning as Joe's emotional memory, Gogo is the doubter. He remembers the fights, the tears, the difficult transition of living without his father and the strain of sporadic visits. As Joe watches, Gogo reenacts these memories, effectively pulling the past into the present for analysis.

The characters of Mom and Dad are loving and supportive of Joe, but they are obviously struggling with their own problems and priorities. Flashes of bitterness keep the reality of divorce alive in the action.

The fifteen short scenes weave together past events and present action. In the present, Joe anticipates Dad's arrival and the reunion is an extravagance of forbidden indulgences. In the past, broken promises and emotional injuries are replayed. Joe (with help from Gogo) wrestles with his memories and dreams,

trying to negotiate a plan for his future. Part of him is willing to gamble on his Dad's promise; part of him worries that change will only mean more pain for everyone. This structure allows the audience to flip back and forth in time, building tension over Joe's dilemma.

Thomas's sparse dialogue is supported by clear physical images and actions. He has not sugar-coated Joe's emotional turmoil or the residual tension between the parents. Yet the play is postive: it may not be possible to mend the rift of divorce, but Joe is able to build a bridge of connection which allows his family to move into the future with a clearer understanding of each other. It's a bold examination of a child's growth through one of life's tougher lessons. Like all well-written plays, *Two Weeks, Twice a Year* raises questions that teachers and parents should be prepared to discuss.

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Dying to be Thin is Dying to be Seen

Dying To Be Thin. Linda A. Carson. Scirocco Drama, 1993. 48 pp. no price, paper. ISBN 09-697-2613-9.

In her semi-autobiographical, one-person play, *Dying To Be Thin*, Linda A. Carson, herself a survivor of bulimia, provides an insightful, if slightly flawed, portrait of a young woman struggling with an eating disorder. Successfully personalizing the formidable statistics of young women who suffer from negative body-images into a very accessible piece of theatre, Carson attempts to remedy, or at least address, this widespread cultural obsession.

Seventeen-year-old Amanda Jones resolves at the beginning of the play that today she is going to have her "Last Ever in My Whole Life Binge," before fasting away to her ideal weight. As she prepares the copious amounts of food for this binge, Amanda recounts the details of her bulimic history with great candour, explaining how it began, why it has persisted and her own helplessness to stop what she sees as a "stupid" habit. Bulimia is portrayed as the controlling factor in Amanda's life — "I'm always waiting until I'm skinnier before I let myself go out" — keeping her away from school and friends.

There are moments of touching honesty in this play, as for example, when Amanda explains her reasons for purging: "... while I eat, this tiny part of me watches, and sometimes tries to make me stop, but it's way too small so I just block it out. That way I can finish eating and throw up. Throwing up is the only route back to *this* me." The poignancy in Amanda's speech is underscored with humorous interludes, such as her impersonation of "Ms Upperchucker, here to talk to you all today about toilets."

Carson tackles the debilitating effects of his disease with no apologies, depicting in graphic detail the extremes to which Amanda will go in order to

maintain strict control over her eating patterns. However, though it is undoubtedly important to demonstrate how unglamorous a condition bulimia is, Carson deviates from the otherwise tightly unified text in a segment about Amanda's encounter with a depraved individual in a dark alley. Amanda describes how her attacker passes child pornography under a public bathroom door after she locks him out. This section seems strangely out of place, introducing in much too cursory a fashion a rather sordid sub-plot.

With the exception of her questionable depiction of both Amanda's parents and the medical profession as utterly obtuse, Carson very cleverly weaves all of the psychological and sociological contributing factors of bulimia into the monologue without having it sound clinical or artificial. In so doing, she gently opens the doors of self-recognition for those audience members who may themselves be suffering from a comparable disorder.

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Unmasking the Bully and other Schoolyard Games

I met a Bully on the Hill. Martha Brooks and Maureen Hunter. Scirocco Drama, J. Gordon Shillingford Publishing Inc., 1995. 52 pp., $9.95 paper. ISBN 0-896239-02-1. ***Not So Dumb: Four Plays for Young People.*** John Lazarus. Coach House Press, 1993. 205 pp. $16.95 paper. ISBN 0-88910-453-0.

When eight-year-old J.J., the new kid at school, denies she is being tormented by Raymond the schoolyard bully, her perceptive comrade-in-arms, David, challenges her frightened silence with this well-observed harasser's catalogue:

> 'Right—nothing. Nothing Number One: he calls you names. Nothing Number Two: he terrorizes you. Nothing Number Three: he makes you sick at your stomach so you never want to come to school. Am I getting close? Nothing Number Four: he extorts money from you.' (30)

Martha Brooks and Maureen Hunter's play *I met a Bully on the Hill,* is a perceptive and compassionate exploration of the archetypal conflict between the playground bully and his quarry. First produced by Prairie Theatre Exchange in Winnipeg as part of its 1986-87 school tour, the socially realistic one-act play directly reflects the culture and concerns of its elementary school audiences; adults are on the periphery in this depiction of a child's world.

At some point most young children find themselves in J.J.'s shoes. With a light, humorous hand, *I met a Bully on the Hill* offers several practical solutions to bullying. Brooks's and Hunter's characters are complex and sympathetically drawn. As the play's gruff nine-year-old antagonist with a blood sense for his peers' Achilles tendons, Raymond presents a manipulative, angry exterior which masks a frightened child; he lives in mortal terror of the dark and of his sadistic older sister. The playwrights have created an engaging triumvirate of co-conspirators who join forces to defuse Raymond's destructive offensives: "Jonquil

Josephine," the bright, sensitive, and gregarious new kid who dons her namesake daffodil yellow as a talisman; David, the sardonic eight-year-old musician who spouts jazz trivia and idolizes Wynton Marsalis; and Karla, the tough girl with the warm heart, who outstrips her contemporaries in strength and stature.

When J.J. arrives at urban Buena Vista School fresh from an idyllic upbringing in the country, she is ripe for Raymond's picking: small for her age, though well-endowed with pluck and a strong moral sense, she is inclined to think the best of people; having lost her father at a young age, she keenly misses her grandfather's warmth and wisdom and the wonders of the pastoral world she has had to leave behind. When Raymond heartlessly squashes her prized Swallowtail caterpillar, J.J. chastises the big kid and then kicks him in the shins, thereby unleashing his ire. Like the proverbial ogre under the bridge, Raymond haunts the hill between the school and J.J.'s new house, charging the little girl a heavy toll payable in quarters, homework rendered, and tears. When David and Karla (who have bested Raymond in the past with brain and brawn respectively) uncover J.J.'s plight, they pool their resources to knock the wind out of his sails. What begins with a harmless prank leads to harsher punishment. Despite J.J.'s protestations that Raymond is "just a little kid" (47), Karla and David sabotage the bully and leave him hand-cuffed to the bridge as night falls. Cornered, Raymond finally lets his mask slip: "Don't leave me here. Please! Don't go. Okay? (*Fights tears.*) I'm scared. I mean I'm really scared of the dark. J.J." (45)

It is J.J.'s compassion (spurred on by her grandfather's wise words) which ultimately transforms Raymond from tormentor into "nothing but a pack of playing-cards." Though kindness rather than cruelty prevails, *I met a Bully on the Hill* is neither preachy nor condescending to its young audience; Brooks and Hunter demonstrate how each child must find his/her own means of dealing with the bully. In the play's realistic resolution, Raymond is not magically transformed into an ally, merely reduced to what he really is, an unhappy nine-year-old who knows when he has been beaten.

Bullies in a variety of guises also figure on- and off-stage in John Lazarus's engaging dramatic quartet *Not So Dumb — Four Plays for Young People*. *Schoolyard Games*, *Not So Dumb*, *Night Light*, and *Secrets* depict several phases in the uneasy metamorphosis of four young protagonists from children into teenagers, as they grapple with bullies, confront childhood fears, and dodge exclusive cliques along the ever-evolving schoolyard gauntlet. Written between 1981 and 1992 for performance by Vancouver's highly acclaimed Green Thumb Theatre for Young People, the published texts also include an historically rich and insightful introduction by Canadian playwright Dennis Foon, who in his role as founding artistic director and dramaturge at Green Thumb Theatre and colleague to Lazarus directed the premiere productions of the first three theatrical works.

Inspired by the travails of his own young daughters, in *Schoolyard Games* Lazarus explores the intricate triangular dynamics between ten-year-old Eleanor, her eight-year-old sister Binnie, and their nine-year-old friend Susan. The playground jungle-gym around which the three girls alternately frolic and collide serves as an apt metaphor for the psychological teeter-totter which the trio energetically ride. With the quicksilver speed of a round of "Double Dutch" the play shifts from harmony to discord and back again. As the self-centred, domi-

neering older sister anxious to shake her bouncy younger sibling, Eleanor dreams of a place on the school gymnastics team, an entrée to the older crowd, and boys. Her precocious little sister, Binnie, combines a quirky sense of humour and almost irrepressible high spirits with an uncanny knack for the profound observation. It is Binnie who so aptly defines the unwritten playground code to which she as the littlest is especially vulnerable as "the law of the jungle gym" (32). Susan, who struggles to play amicably with both sisters, ultimately serves as a balancing device between them. All three girls demonstrate a fundamental need to be accepted, especially by the big kids.

When Eleanor gets the chance to accompany the gym team to watch the "Provincials" tournament, she selfishly decides to exclude both younger girls from the outing. Like a "fairweather friend," she exploits Susan's admiration and shuns her kid sister while playing the role of know-it-all gymnastics tutor. When her pupil democratically tries to include Binnie in the proceedings, Eleanor's ensuing anger precipitates injury for Susan and misery for all three. In the end Susan and Binnie choose clemency rather than revenge for the oldest girl's transgressions. Though Lazarus only hints at the sources of Eleanor's antagonism in *Schoolyard Games*, he has certainly captured the exclusive "twosey" bully which I still recall with trepidation from my own childhood.

In his Chalmers and Jessie award-winning play, *Not So Dumb*, Lazarus explores a more insidious kind of collective bullying which children (and indeed adults) face when they differ from the crowd: social ostracism by one's peers. Two years older but just as spunky, Binnie reappears with her ten-year-old compatriot Rocky in Lazarus's imaginative exploration of the trials of the learning-disabled child. The dramatist accepted a commission to write the play from the Vancouver Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities when he discovered that his bubbly eight-year-old heroine from *Schoolyard Games* embodied many of the traits of the classic dyslexic. Drawing on his own troubled childhood experiences as the gifted class "nerd," the playwright created Victor, the earnest, exceptionally bright and lonely classroom day monitor as both a foil and an unlikely kindred spirit for the alienated duo, Binnie and Rocky.

When Binnie and Rocky's beloved reading teacher, Mrs. Smith, also a one-time "L.D." (73), fails to show up for their bi-weekly tutorial, the curious youngsters decide to pillage her filing cabinet in search of their own confidential assessments. Hobbled by their dyslexia and dysgraphia however, neither child can decipher her comments. When Victor catches them red-handed, the trio conflict, compare notes on the relative perils of not fitting in, and ultimately coconspire to read and replace the files. In the process, Lazarus turns the concept of disability on its head, thereby revealing the special gifts inherent in all three children: Rocky's sharp intelligence, as evidenced by his swift decoding of the colour filing system, and his mechanical deftness in fixing Victor's tape-recorder; the cryptic wonder of Binnie's "mirror writing" — a process which baffles Victor when he tries his hand at it; and Victor's talents as literary interpreter and sleuth. *Not So Dumb* not only sheds light on the misunderstood world of the exceptional child, but it demonstrates to its young audiences that kinship can blossom in the most unexpected places.

In *Night Light*, Lazarus blends social realism with fantasy in his delightful

and insightful look at real and imaginary bullies. While ten-year-old Victor grapples by day with Farley, the soccer-ball-wielding, tough-talking schoolyard underachiever, his little sister Tara wrestles at bedtime with a terrifying reptilian, one-eyed monster, who emerges from the shadows of her dresser drawers. Like J.J. in *I met a Bully on the Hill*, Victor finds himself saddled with Farley's homework as a means to stave off the bully's physical onslaughts. Lazarus too lets Farley's mask slip in order to illuminate what makes him tick: the bully's worst fear, as Victor and Tara eventually discover, is failing to live up to the high academic standards set by his engineer father. Little Tara's night visitations are preceded by nightmarish images of "needles and threads" (118): their father has just been admitted to hospital for a routine hernia operation. With some comical empirical testing prompted by a book on children's fears, both Victor and Tara ultimately befriend their harassers. Armed with new insights into Farley's motivation, Victor evolves from scapegoat into amicable, if rigorous, tutor. When Tara realizes that her "creature" has feelings too, she takes him under her wing, agrees to draw his portrait, and begins to give him English lessons. Lazarus makes marvellous comic use of dramatic irony in his depiction of the scary monster who just wants to be loved. In *Night Light* (which also won a Jessie Award), neither Farley nor "Goodge" — as the Green Thumb monster was fondly dubbed — are what they appear to be. "Bullies," as Lazarus compassionately demonstrates, "are more scared than anybody" (131).

Ostracism, non-conformity and peer pressure are central issues in *Secrets*, the final play in the *Not So Dumb* anthology. The playgrounds, teasing, and childhood banter of Lazarus's earlier pieces are replaced with highschool parties, rumours, and rock music. Binnie, Rocky, Victor, and Susan return to the stage as worldly teenagers grappling with questions of sexuality, honesty, fidelity, and self-esteem. The play chronicles the disintegration of the teenage romance between childhood pals Binnie and Rocky, the unlikely but promising conjunction of Victor and Susan, and a step towards self-understanding for all four. *Secrets* is arguably the most dramatically complex in Lazarus's quartet: it uses dovetailed plots, theatrical asides, doubled roles, and, expressionistic masks which serve to differentiate his non-conformist protagonists from the antagonistic, trendy in-crowd who dominate the social scene.

Secrets, as Lazarus's resonant title suggests, is a play about hidden truths. Masked or not, in this complicated adolescent theatrical realm nobody is quite what he/she seems to be. Against the back-drop of a party at Victor's house, Victor, Susan, Binnie and Rocky reveal their innermost selves — warts and all — to the audience and eventually to each other. Both Victor and Susan are victims of the teenage rumour-mill: he is presumed to be gay; she has been labelled sexually promiscuous; both are actually virgins. Left to their own devices to talk and dance in Tara's bedroom, the two discover a genuine mutual attraction. Rocky and Binnie, on the other hand, have been sexually active together for some time. Not ready for monogamous commitment but afraid to hurt Binnie, Rocky has concealed a number of tacit sexual encounters from his doting, self-critical partner. When she finally discovers his infidelities, Binnie musters the necessary confidence to break up the relationship. "If we're gonna learn anything from this god-awful night," she confides later to Susan, "it's forget what they *say*. It's the

look in his eyes" (201). The first step towards happiness is this confusing adolescent world, Lazarus implies in *Secrets*, is to look beneath the surface when you choose your friends; the second is to have the courage to make your own decisions. As Susan succinctly puts it at the play's conclusion, "... let the cretins think whatever they want" (205).

Sarah Gibson-Bray is a specialist in English-Canadian Theatre for Young Audiences. She wrote her doctoral thesis on Vancouver playwright Dennis Foon (University of Toronto, 1992). She is currently compiling an index and guide to "child advocacy drama" in Canada.

Reviews That Make Good Reading

The Squeeze-More-Inn. Elizabeth Ferber. Scholastic, 1995. 32 pp., $5.95 paper. ISBN 0-590-24444-2. ***Flood Fish.*** Robin Eversole Illus. Sheldon Greenberg. Crown, 1995. Unpag., $20.00 cloth. ISBN 0 517 59705-5. ***Zebo and the Dirty Planet.*** Kim Fernandes. Annick. 1991. $14.95., cloth. ISBN 1-55037-183-5. ***The Magic Ear.*** Laura Langston. Illus. Victor Bosson. Orca Books, 1995. Unpag., $14.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55143-035-5. ***Ten Mondays for Lots of Boxes.*** Sue Ann Alderson. Illus. Caddie T'Kenye. Ronsdale Press, 1995. Unpag. ISBN 0-921870 32-9. ***Is it OK If This Monster Stays for Lunch?*** Martyn Godfrey. Illus. Susan Wilkinson. Oxford University Press, 1992. Unpag., $7.95, paper. ISBN. 0-19-540882-9. ***Little Wynne's Giggly Thing.*** Laurel Dee Gugler. Illus. Russ Willms. Annick, 1995. Unpag., $5.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-406-0.

The following reviews are special. They are composed by people training to be teachers: people who will be responsible for choosing books for their own classrooms — for the children they will be teaching.

What the reviewers may lack in experience, they make up in expertise. They've spent an academic term preparing to write these critiques. As students in the "Access to Literacies" class I taught in the fall of 1995 in Faculty of Education at the University of New Brunswick, the reviewers learned both how to read children's books and how to read reviews. That's the knowledge they bring to their writing.

Within the picture book section of the course, the students examined a wide variety of books for children, ranging from the elegantly simple *The Cat on the Mat* by Brian Wildsmith (Oxford) to the philosophically complex *Zoom Upstream* by Tim Wynne-Jones with illustrations by Ken Nutt (Groundwood). The students acquired their critical language both through class discussions and through careful attention to several excellent theoretical resource guides, all published by The Thimble Press: *Tell Me: Children Reading, and Talk* by Aidan Chambers; *Looking at Pictures in Picturebooks* by Jane Doonan; and *How Texts Teach What Readers Learn* by Margaret Meek.

In a formal exercise I set, called "Access to Information," the students assess reviews of the kind published in guides — for parents and/or teachers — to children's books. They looked at books designed particularly to help teachers choose books for their classrooms: among them were *Choosing Children's Books*

(Pembroke) by David Booth, Larry Swartz and Meguido Zola; *Michele Landsberg's Guide to Children's Books* (Penguin) by Michele Landsberg; and *Classics for Children and Young People* (Thimble) by Margery Fisher. I've written about the exercise in *Signal* 74 (May 1994) if you are interested in exploring the rationale.

What the students discovered was that in order to write the kind of review that helped them make informed choices, they had to have a wide range of knowledge: about individual authors; about the genre; and about the way a book is put together, its coherence. They learn that plot summaries are not very helpful, nor descriptions of pictures as "colourful" or "detailed," and that throwaway phrases such "suitable for children of all ages" are not helpful either.

The new books sent to the students in the class by *CCL* for review enabled the students to try out their newly acquired skills in a very practical way. One of the things all the reviewers notice in their analyses of the books is the coherence between pictures, texts, and the "point" of the story. If any element is out of balance with the others, the book suffers. In the group of books reviewed here, all the relationships are carefully considered. I think the reviewers have done brilliantly. These are the kinds of reviews I want to read, the kinds of reviews that help me make informed assessments of books. Though I've helped with the editing on the final versions, the reviews are as the students, in groups of three, wrote them. Judge for yourself.

Kimberly Corbett, Ann D. Inscho and Mary Beth O'Brien reviewed *The Squeeze-More-Inn*, a book whose elements they found to be as harmonious as those in a perfect summer holiday.

> The title of Elizabeth Ferber's second book for children, *The Squeeze-More-Inn*, reminds the reader of summer vacations with the entire family squeezed into a small cottage (or an inn with one of those awful punning names), squeezing as much as possible into a short holiday weekend. Even the "More-Inn" part of the title is a play on words: the name of the protagonist of the story is "Maureen," a young girl who invites her best friend to spend the weekend with her at the family cottage. The two girls experience the summer delights of swimming until their skin wrinkles, building sand castles, and exploring for treasures from the sea: all the warm fuzzies of happy childhood holidays.
>
> The illustrations are like snap-shot memories. The watercolour drawings melt into indistinct outlines, suggesting that they might have been made by a young child. Ferber's talent as a greeting card illustrator and cartoonist contributes to the warm feel of the pictures. The book is child-centred, but safe, focusing on what is important to a child: having fun at the beach on a summer weekend.

Flood Fish is a book that made a deep impression on the reviewers Kelly Hay, Matthew LeBrun and Kenda Mitten.

> Where do the flood fish come from? When the riverbeds of the arid Australian outback suddenly fill up with rain, the water magically brings with it a flood of huge, motley-coloured fish. Everyone has their own theory about where the fish come from, but no one knows for certain. Not even science has the answer to this puzzling natural phenomenon.
>
> Perhaps "the gum trees heavy with rain drop their slim, fish-shaped leaves," or maybe "the moon sows fish eggs when she cries on the nights of high water."

Wherever the flood fish come from "when the puddles dry up ... [T]hey leave no bones."

If readers dig deeper, they will find that the mystery of the flood fish parallels the mystery of life. If one believes in the primordial soup theory of the evolution of life from the sea then *Flood Fish* is quite like a pre-historical family album of the human race. On the other hand, perhaps, as the young narrator naively suggests, the fish have mystically metamorphosed out of rocks and leaves. Or, as the grandfather suggests, the fish eggs lie hidden in caves, deep underground, "like old pearls" waiting in the mud to be brought to life. All scenarios are possible.

The large double-spread illustrations, unlimited by borders, extend into the landscape of the readers' minds. The rich, acrylic paint is spread thinly, so the grain of the canvas shows through, giving all the landscapes a touchable quality. The cool, blue water contrasts with the burnt umber of the desert. The story is literally "cooled off" when the rain comes.

Flood Fish is about renewal and rebirth. The image of the fish eggs is echoed throughout the book: in the underwater bubbles, the dew drops, the moon, and the water itself. All are perfect circles, all endlessly re-create themselves. Like the flood fish.

The textured, multilayered quality of the review of *Flood Fish* testifies to how much there is worth saying about the book. The review of *Zebo and the Dirty Planet* by Deanna Foley, Wendy Flynn, and Jill Maxwell, is a much shorter review, suggesting, I think, that, though they like the book, it has less to say.

Have you ever seen a dirty planet? Hop on board the extra-terrestrial ark with stowaways Amy and Andrew, as Zebo takes them on a three-dimensional journey. This "green book" uses the natural hues of earthy reds, blues and greens to depict the state of the environment. The healthy new land is rendered in clear, saturated colour, while the earth has the muddied tones of a polluted planet. Fernandes has constructed her pictures out of Fimo (the modelling material children often use for jewellery making) so that they have a moulded quality to them.

Zebo and the Dirty Planet is a Noah's ark story for an age threatened by environmental disasters. The endangered species (all faithfully rendered in the pictures) are saved by a space-ship ark. In the event that a space ark is unavailable for rescue, the book ends with a helpful list of recycling tips.

The Magic Ear, reviewed by Sherri-Lynn Butt, Mandy Copp and Susan Maxwell, is an obviously beautiful book. But is it saying anything?

The Magic Ear is supposed to be a retelling of a Japanese Legend, but it is really more like the popular North American versions of *The Little Mermaid* or *Sleeping Beauty*. The text is mainly a vehicle for the exquisite illustrations.

If Hoderi (the hero) was so "poor" and "honest," how did he manage to seize the most prized possession of Neriza's underwater kingdom and purchase the hand of the rainbow princess? The morals are puzzling. The wealthiest noblemen are idolized, dirty ragged peasants are scorned, and women rescued from serpents are won with lumps of gold.

Hoderi's supposed courage, honour and integrity are gift-wrapped in Victor Bosson's harvest-toned watercolour and pencil crayon illustrations, each picture

boxed in an origami frame. If you give *The Magic Ear* as a Christmas gift, it will look great under the tree — but not on your book shelf.

While *The Magic Ear* was praised for its pictures, but not for its text, Beverly McLaughlin, Beverly White and Valerie Anderson, the reviewers of *Ten Mondays for Lots of Boxes* were unmoved by anything about the book.

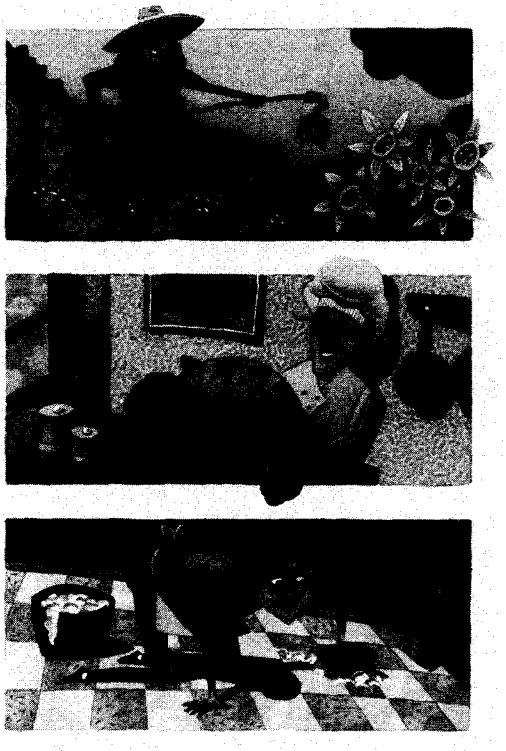
> Sue Anne Alderson's fourteenth book, *Ten Mondays for Lots of Boxes* is neither as poetic nor as lively as the "Bonnie" books which secured her reputation. There, Fiona Garrick's black-ink illustrations for Bonnie, flatter the comedy of the story. In Alderson's new book, Caddie T'Kenye's smudged pencil drawings do nothing to bring the characters to life.
>
> *Ten Mondays for Lots of Boxes* is about a boy named "Lots of Boxes," and the hardships he must endure in moving to a new place. The "boxed" characters, "Lots of Boxes," "Sky-Climber," and "Easy as Pie" have little appeal in an overworked text partnered with lifeless pencil drawings. The characters meet "Thundering Dunderblusses," a "Wandering Blue-Eyed Glumfy," and a zesty "Thronk" but they are all names without content. The drawings bleed colour from the text, leaving the reader feeling empty. "Lots of Boxes" is empty too. His hollow, black-blotted eyes match his empty character. His move across town was a bad move, a boring move with limited appeal and few surprises.

Mary Burton, Susan McCurdy and Chin-Er Yang, the reviewers of *Is it OK If this Monster Stays For Lunch?*, also found themselves in the uncomfortable position of reviewing a book they didn't like, even though it was by well-known author. It seems unlikely that Martyn Godfrey will be as successful as a picture-book author as he is as an author of books for older children.

> *Is it OK If This Monster Stays for Lunch?* depicts the experience of a little girl adapting to the hurried world of the modern family. When Megan (the protagonist) is deprived of her family's attention, she reverts into the world of her imaginary monster friends. But the monsters are pale shades of another monster who comforts a lonely girl: the gorilla in Anthony Browne's *Gorilla*. Godfrey's careless text doesn't help. Puzzlingly, Megan is an apparently happy child who runs, hops, and rides through the days of the week with her monster friends — who have about as much emotional resonance as Barney the purple dinosaur. *Is it OK If This Monster Stays For Lunch?* is a frivolous excursion by Martyn Godfrey into the world of picture books.

I couldn't end this cluster of reviews on that down note, so I've placed at the end, the most radical book reviewed in this group. It too is about a girl adapting to the "hurried world" of family life, but the results are better. The reviewers of *Little Wynne's Giggly Thing*, Melissa Adams, Mandi Shannon and John Knoll, noticed almost from the beginning that this book revels in surprises. They like it a lot. So do I.

> *Little Wynne's Giggly Thing* is a no nonsense story. The logical, linear text is juxtaposed with the distorted perspective of the nonsense illustrations. The gender boundaries are bent in the contrast between the soft, round shapes and the angular sharp lines.
>
> At the centre of this story's intrigue is the post-nuclear family: "Who are these people?" Gender roles as family relations are deliberately distorted. This is a



family story, but don't expect Ma and Pa Kettle! Russ Willm's illustrations offer a clever blurring of gender and family roles: unisex clothing and androgynous body types. Little Wynne seeks the approval of "her" family, a gender ambiguous bunch named Molly, Kim and Jeri.

How does Little Wynne fit into this family? The parent/child roles are as obscured as the gender roles. The only evidence the reader has that Wynne is the child in this menage is her struggle for adult acceptance.

The text overtly tells the story of Wynne's longing for acceptance, while the subtext speaks of creation, repression and release of emotions. When Wynne's inventions are rejected, they are "repressed" to the closet, only to be let out to the laughter and celebration at the story's end.

An upbeat note to end the reviews!

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Crabs for Dinner. Adwoa Badoe. Illus. Belinda Ageda. Sister Vision, 1995. Unpag., paper. ISBN 0-920813-27-5. ***A Fish Tale, or The Little One that Got Away***. Leo Yerxa. Groundwood, 1995. Unpag., $17.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88899-247-5. ***From Far Away***. Robert Munsch and Saoussan Askar. Illus. Michael Martchenko. Annick Press, 1995. Unpag., $16.95, $4.95, cloth, paper. ISBN 1-55037-397-8, 1-55037-396-X. ***The Magic Braid***. Rina Singh. Illus. Farida Zaman. Sister Vision, 1995. Unpag., paper. ISBN 0-920813-25-9.

One of the principal elements of Canadian children's literature has been the theme of being a stranger: moving to the new country of Canada; fighting against a loss of cultural values and identity; and rediscovering a sense of self and belonging. Most of these narratives have been historical fiction for older readers. A growing number of picture books, however, have examined with emotional authenticity and contemporary realism the second stage after arrival in Canada: the adaptation to a new culture while keeping alive the memories and traditions of the home country.

Three picture books take different approaches to this subject of cultural heritage and diversity. Munsch's *From Far Away* focuses on the full cycle of immigration (exodus, arrival, acculturation). *Crabs for Dinner* dramatizes generational conflict in the struggle to keep cultural customs and traditions alive. *The Magic Braid* stresses the value of memory and imagination in overcoming homesickness and alienation.

From Far Away is a fascinating collaboration between Munsch and Saoussan Askar, a seven-year-old Lebanese-Canadian girl whose letters to Munsch told a poignant story. Together they developed that story into an epistolary, autobiographical picture book: a letter from Saoussan to her reading buddy, dramatizing her frightening experiences in war-torn Beirut and her rocky adjustment to life in Scarborough.

The first person storytelling voice has a simple strength and dignity rarely found in Munsch's usual frenetic prose. The authentic child-perspective adds a clarity to the amorphous and painful experiences. Concrete details summarize: a seven-year-old's perception of war ("Even where my sister and I slept there were holes in the wall"); the strain and humiliation of adjusting to a new language and culture (Saoussan crawls to the washroom because she doesn't know how to speak English and she pees in the teacher's lap when frightened); the disorientation caused by new rituals and traditions (the child is traumatized by the image of a Hallowe'en skeleton, believing another war is imminent. Michael Martchenko's illustrations are appropriately less cartoon-like than in his art for other titles by Munsch, demonstrating greater realism and range of emotions in the portraiture.

Martchenko captures the comfort of new friends and pride in beginning fluency in English. His illustration for the humorous face-off of Saoussan and her mother is a witty encapsulation of a moment of cultural and generational conflict as Saoussan decides to change her name to the more Scarborough-like Susan, "but my mother told me to change it back."

The conflict between parents and children around old traditions and new Canadian norms is also a major theme in Adwoa Badoe's *Crabs for Dinner*. The

children of a family from Ghana reject the traditional African foods that delight their parents. Instead of crab, fufu, or palm nut soup, they choose North American french fries, hamburgers, and pizza. But when their grandmother visits from Africa with gifts of traditional dress, Ananse folktales, and authentic cooking, the children are won over.

The charm and warmth of this brief narrative come from the same child's first-person point-of-view that is so engaging in *From Far Away*. The colloquial style is simple, colourful, and expressive and the cumulative, patterned structure provides a taste of the rhythmic quality of a folktale.

A major strength of the book lies in Belinda Ageda's vigorous art work. The expressionist style, bright colours, and strong draughtsmanship offer lively vignettes of family and African life. Close-ups of large, friendly faces, arms, and legs around the dinner table effectively build the visual sense of a small child's perceptions in the midst of warm people, life in a multigenerational family. The nurturing comfort of this tale is tangible.

Rina Singh's *The Magic Braid* is also about the importance of family, but its focus is on the isolating distance between generations living in different countries. As Amrita's mother combs the girl's long braid, they talk about India, the far-away grandparents, the family photo album. In a day-dream fantasy, the girl journeys to India to embrace her grandparents via whale, camel, and cloud.

The text lacks clarity. The omniscient point-of-view shifting between Amrita and her mother is confusing. The child's transition into fantasy via the talisman of her braid is abrupt and unconvincing. The language lacks the concrete colour and freshness of the other two, more child-centred, texts.

Farida Zaman's richly patterned and softly coloured wash paintings add a loose, dreamy quality to the book which parallels the fantasy element. The simplistic cartoonlike portraiture, however, detracts from the overall effect.

All three of these books were written by authors who lived the experiences of immigration, the trials of acculturation, and the pain of missing family and country. *From Far Away* and *Crabs for Dinner* cast the narratives in a convincingly authentic child's voice which conveys the experiences and emotions more credibly than in *The Magic Braid.*

Canadian picturebook authors and illustrators are increasingly drawn from the talent of our ethnically diverse population. Many writers create out of a cultural tradition and tell stories that reflect the uniqueness of a particular cultural vision. First Nations author and illustrator Leo Yerxa did just that in his first picturebook, the award-winning *Last Leaf First Snowflake to Fall.*

In his second book, *A Fish Tale, or The Little One that Got Away,* however, Yerxa creates an animal fable (actually a fish story) that is parable pure and simple. The subject and tongue-in-cheek, storytelling tone may owe something to native legend. Certainly, the casual, slightly rambling, oral storytelling style and offbeat humour are close to the colloquial quality of certain forms of native lore. But on the surface, the story is more related to the classic fish fable *Swimmy* by America's Leo Lionni. The narrative is simple: A young adventurous fish outsmarts a tricky older fish and saves himself from seductive lures, hooks, and flies to live to a wise old age and write a book about his experience.

Yerxa's remarkable paintings give life to a shimmering underwater world with arresting mixed media of watercolours and stencilled pastels. This is a fascinating, expansive book with roots in multiple traditions and the commonality of children's literature.

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Video, film and play reviews

Getting Involved: Interactive Theatre for Young Adults

Veronia. Daniel Liebman. Produced by Quest Theatre, Calgary. ***Tag.*** Clem Martini. Produced by Quest Theatre, Calgary.

Daniel Liebman's *Veronia* and Clem Martini's *Tag,* two recent productions by Calgary's Quest Theatre, suggest well the impressive range and ability of the company as well as the strength and diversity of contemporary playwriting aimed at young audiences.

Martini's *Tag* (which I saw at St. Cecilia's with a K-6 audience) is the starting piece for an examination of conflict among children and possibilities for avoiding such situations or, at least, resolving them. The story involves the antagonism between two nine-year-old friends, Kelly and Jason, over Jason's prized baseball cap. The action, set in an abandoned building represented by a simple climbing frame structure that allows a variety of movement and levels of action, involves escalation from name-calling and a little shoving to a series of serious accidents. The exaggerated consequences of a trivial incident fit with Martini's generally exaggerated form for his play: his technique is broad farce and

characterizations are oversized. It is a strategy which certainly keeps his audience rapt and the laughs coming quickly and often (with tried and tested classics such as someone's pants getting pulled down to reveal garishly coloured underwear!).

What is most successful about this play is how connections are made between emotionally hurtful moments and actual physical violence. Those connections become clear as do their consequences. Performers Nikki Lundmark, Gary Nugent, and Edward Belanger did a fine job in showing how hard it is to be vulnerable and how easy it is to act tough — and it was a message that seemed to get heard. As stage manager Debbie Read pointed out to me, the show itself is only the first stage of Quest's project with a school on conflict resolution. The team spend the rest of the day with that school in various workshops with individual classes working with students in improvisations and question-and-answer sessions based on the play in order to develop their audience's understanding of the issues.

Tag has been playing through several seasons with Quest including the 25 shows in Fall 1996. *Veronia* is on tour through Alberta, Saskatchewan, and BC, with an extraordinary 83 performances in total. I saw their 62nd since October 7th (at Huntingdon Hills Elementary School, again for a K-6 audience). I found *Veronia* a fascinating play, moving between "history" and the present, community responsibility and consumerist greed, with a deft and skilful ease. The plot involves Ronnie, a homework-hating elementary school student, who identifies more with her Mercedes-Benz-coveting father than her liberal altruist mother. A social studies assignment leads her to read in the textbook the story of her own great-grandmother, a new immigrant to Alberta from Roumania and the hardships she had to endure (near starvation, racism, life in a sod house, learning English an so on). As Ronnie's "dream" takes her back to experience first-hand those hardships, she develops a new awareness both of her own cultural history and the need to support those less able to support themselves. The play opens with the father and daughter's derision of a bag lady rummaging through their garbage; it ends with their offering her food and shelter. Idealistic, yes, but also convincing: *Veronia* doesn't preach to the kids but shows them some of the choices that each and every one of us can make.

I had thought that the slippages between past and present, twentieth-century Ronnie and nineteenth-century Veronia, a little too slick perhaps for the young audience but apart from one or two minor confusions (answered in the audience talkback), they clearly revelled in it. Their horror as the nineteenth-century father went to beat his daughter for her laziness and lack of respect was palpable; their concern with social responsibility was laudable. (In the talkback, it was astutely pointed out by the actors that it's not always safe to invite a stranger into your home, a sign of the times for sure, and the children were very quick to suggest donations to food banks and shelters, naming some of the most prominent in this city.)

Veronia's performers Paul Cowling, Terry Middleton, Rebecca Northan and Charlene Sashuk gave a rich and complex texture to Liebman's characters. All ages were clearly engaged by each character as well as the relationships between them. And that, in the end, seemed the most important part of the play: that we understood a little more about how we relate to people, what we get right and what we get wrong and the necessity, always, to look behind the surface to appreciate something of the history every person brings to their day-to-day existence. Not an easy thing to remind an elementary school audience of since

their own lives are still somehow so new, but Liebman's play reached both the hearts and minds of his spectators. I much admired this play.

Both these plays show what complex and engaging dramatic material there is available for young audiences in Canada as well as the enthusiasm of those audiences in responding to much more than "kids' entertainment."

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Shakespeare — The Animated Tales

Videos: ***A Midsummer Night's Dream.*** 1992. ISBN 0-679-83902-X. ***The Tempest.*** 1992. ISBN 0-679-83905-4. ***Hamlet.*** 1992. ISBN 0-679-83921-6. ***Macbeth.*** 1992. ISBN 0-679-83917-8. All screenplays and abridgments by Leon Garfield. Random House Home Video. Each approx. 30 min. Each $18.95.

Books: (Sold separately.) ***A Midsummer Night's Dream.*** ISBN 0-679-83870-8. ***The Tempest.*** ISBN 0-679-83873-2. ***Hamlet.*** ISBN 0-679-83871-6. ***Macbeth.*** ISBN 0-679-83875-9. All abridgments by Leon Garfield. All published by Alfred A. Knopf, 1992-93. Each $6.99 paper; library bindings available.

The Random House Home Video versions of six plays are perhaps the most useful introductions to Shakespeare educators at all levels are likely to find; the books, however, are less satisfactory. Each play utilizes different graphics: some are drawn, others use animated puppets or dolls. The books illustrate their abridgments of the texts with the videos' graphics. My dissatisfaction with the books is that their texts do not match the abridgments in the videos nor are they complete texts: they would be much more useful if they did either one thing or the other. Each video uses a narrator for introductory and other materials which are not "acted." All six abridgments are well done and for the most part give accurate overviews of the plays. And, happily, the abridgments tend to stimulate students of various ages to want to learn more about the plays. My six-year grandson is fascinated by *Tempest* and after a dozen viewings asks questions raised but not answered in the video and clamours to

The Tempest

see it "live." Gillian Huffmon, (a former university student of mine) had her Grade 9 students write "reviews" of the *Dream* video after having studied the full text of the play; many in class had also seen it performed at Stratford. Their major criticisms were that too much of the story was narrated rather than acted, that the Titania/Oberon feud over possession the orphan child was omitted; none noticed that Titania's "dotting" on the transformed Bottom was technically bestial sexual lust. The class, however, agreed that the video was a fine introduction of the play to pre-teens, but that it was too abbreviated for older students like themselves. Finally, I found the *Macbeth* an excellent stimulus for discussion of the effect the video's omissions had on interpretation of the play in a senior university class.

A Midsummer Night's Dream

A Midsummer Night's Dream is the only pure fantasy in the Shakespeare canon, but *The Tempest* runs such a close second that comparing the two would be an excellent learning experience for students at any level. *Dream* appears (in the rational Theseus' words) to "give a local habitation and name to things imagined" but, in fact, the play itself illustrates that there are more mysteries in the universe than ever Theseus' cool reason could comprehend: after all, we — the audience — *see* the fairies and what they can accomplish. In *Tempest*, by contrast, everything that appears magical and fantastic to all except Prospero is, in fact, rationally explained: he has learned to create illusions from the books he brought with him to the island. Even the "monster" Caliban has a rational genesis: Shakespeare and his audience believed in the reality of witches and the likelihood of their producing grotesque offspring. On the negative side, I think the graphic rendering of Oberon makes him appear more demonic than the play suggests; Caliban, by contrast, although he scowls a lot, looks more like an overgrown armadillo than the subhuman monster Shakespeare's lines describe. Teachers might also find it useful to ask students if they would respond differently to the two non-human characters in *Tempest* if the video included Ariel's speech expressing pity for Prospero's suffering captives which motivates Prospero to forgive them all for past wrongs (V,1,11-32), and if Caliban were permitted to voice the full version of surely the most beautiful speech in the play — "Be not afeared; the isle is full of noises [music] / that give delight and hurt not" (III,2,144-152) which reveals a side of him unsuspected by Prospero.

Both tragedies are excellent introductions to the plays. My university class rightly agreed that nothing substantial was omitted from *Macbeth* and that the animation was more effective than live or filmed actors could ever be. It opens

with a narrator telling us that "There was war in Scotland. The land was torn and bleeding. But the deepest wounds of all were made by friends turned traitor to fight against Duncan their king. Nothing was as it seemed," surely an ideal thematic introduction. Then we see the witches: each in turn is transformed from a little old lady into a floating, grotesque head, a whirling devilish, a monster as they speak their famous opening lines. This is followed by the first of a series of scenes of violence to which educators of younger students may well object: in a 30-second battle sequence as Macbeth and Banquo fight to save Duncan's throne heads are severed, swords thrust into bodies, a horse slaughtered, until finally the two victors stand victorious amid afield of corpses. There are a few more violent moments later — the murder of Banquo, Banquo's ghost bleeding profusely at the Banquet scene, and McDuff's final slaughter of Macbeth — but none are any worse than much Saturday morning children's TV and the play is unthinkable without it. The scenes, however, are so striking that they make much more of an impact than possible for human actors fumbling with swords on a stage.

The video follows the play scene by scene: most, of course, are abbreviated, but just about every memorable line from the play is included. Lady Macbeth's "unsex me here" speech is included (but her lines about having given suck, and being willing to bash her children's brains out is missing). The slaughter of Lady Macduff and her children is bloodless: we see the family group as a madonna and children stained glass window which the killers shatter. The same image makes the ending of the video more effective than most live productions: here, as Macbeth battles McDuff although knowing his situation is hopeless, the iconic vision of McDuff's family blinds him to McDuff's killing blow.

The *Hamlet* video is an ideal introduction to Shakespeare's most complex tragedy. It begins with a narrator paraphrasing Marcellus's line that "Something was rotten in Denmark" and then sketching in the background of the plot. Adults familiar with the original may well object to its major omission — the Rosencrantz and Guildenstern characters and sub-plots are totally excluded — but every other major character, scene and event is present, and we hear all the famous lines. The deletion may at first appear sacrilegious, but, clearly, something had to be sacrificed to reduce the four hour original to 30 minutes. And without these scenes the structure of the play as well as the characterizations of the other key figures is more comprehensible to novices. Except for Hamlet's climactic (but bloodless) stabbing of Claudius, there is no violence in the video. The visual aspects of the video are by far the most effective of the six: the expressions on the faces of the drawn characters seem to shift frequently and it appears that a camera is continually roaming throughout Elsinore Castle, pausing to view a scene and then following a winding stone staircase past gothic arches to the next scene.

Note: Reviews of ***Romeo and Juliet*** *and* ***Twelfth Night*** *appeared in CCL No. 72 (1993), pp. 91-95.*

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Romeo in Boxer Shorts

William Shakespeare's Romeo & Juliet. Directed by Baz Luhrmann, with Leonardo DiCaprio, Claire Danes, Brian Dennehy, John Leguizamo, Pete Postlethwaite, Paul Sorvino and Diane Venora. Screenplay by Craig Pearce and Baz Luhrmann. Twentieth Century Fox, 1996.

The opening image is a television set with "snow" on the screen. Then a newscast starts; the anchorwoman looks at the camera and says, "Two households both alike in dignity / In fair Verona where we lay our scene..." The graphic behind her is a broken ring with the tabloid-style title "Star-cross'd lovers" below it. From there we are hurled into a dizzying montage of news footage and newspaper headlines reporting civil mutiny and ancient grudges. Welcome to Verona Beach and Baz Luhrmann's '90s take on a classic, *William Shakespeare's Romeo & Juliet.*

Verona Beach is an overcrowded urban sprawl played in exterior shots by Mexico City. Dominating the skyline are the rival Montague and Capulet office towers. Set against these, ironically, are a huge statue of Christ (being repaired) in the city square and on the top of "St. Peter's church" a stylized Virgin Mary. Circling above it all in his helicopter, Captain Prince (Vondie Curtis-Hall), keeps watch over a violent world where everyone is armed.

The appearance of the TV set is also a clue to Luhrmann's technique. He's transferred the frenetic editing and visual style of modern video to the big screen, and the effect is overwhelming. In his production notes for the film, Luhrmann called Shakespeare "a rambunctious, sexy, violent, entertaining storyteller" and he has developed an equivalent cinematic language. The break-neck opening sequence, the fight between the boys of the two families at a gas station, sets an exhilarating pace for the headlong rush to tragedy. And there have probably never been so many crosses, candles and religious statues on-screen since the days of Josef von Sternberg. It's MTV meets operatic Hispanic Catholicism. Luhrmann has said, "Truly great stories communicate to every kind of person. They were popular entertainments first, so it's like claiming these works back for the audience for which they were written."

Guns with "brand" names like Sword and Rapier and Hawaiian shirts replace daggers and tights, but the language is still Shakespeare, although cut. The Montagues (Brian Dennehy and Christina Pickles) are "Anglo" Americans whose boys have punk hair cuts, while Capulet (Paul Sorvino) is Hispanic and, to judge from his wonderfully vulgar party, nouveau-riche. Tybalt (John Leguizamo) remains the dangerous psychopath found in just about any age. Juliet's other suitor here is Dave Paris, the Governor's son (Paul Rudd, previously seen as the '90s Mr. Knightley in *Clueless*), whose photograph appears on the cover of "Timely." The background is wittily filled with Shakespearean references. (The more Shakespeare you know, the smarter you'll feel.) Romeo and Benvolio shoot pool in the former "Globe Theatre." Billboards advertise Prospero's Furniture: "Such stuff as dreams are made of." The Montague hang-out, the Sycamore Grove beach has a bar, Rosecranzsky's, and a store, The Merchant of Verona Beach. Despite their apparent worldliness (Romeo smokes, writes poetry and drops acid just before the Capulet party, while Juliet carries a gun), the lovers played by Leonardo DiCaprio and Claire Danes have an innocence that is heartbreaking. If each age reinvents the lovers to embody the values of its young

people, then we are clearly on very different terrain from Franco Zeffirelli's lush Renaissance version of 1968. The impulse of these lovers is not toward sex — they are far less sexualized than Olivia Hussey and Leonard Whiting — but toward some impossibly pure state that is achievable only in death. They are continually in or near or falling into water, suggestive of a primal innocence not of this world and safe from adult intrusion. Luhrmann evokes a similarly escapist couple by quoting the climax of the Liebestod from *Tristan und Isolde* to accompany his montage of the lovers after Juliet joins Romeo in death.

Reviewers have complained about the treatment of the verse in this film, just as they did in 1968. Admittedly Hussey, Whiting and company now sound like the RSC in comparison to Luhrmann's cast. DiCaprio may handle the language a little better than Danes, but they both rise equally to the intense emotional demands of the roles. His Romeo has charm and wit, while her Juliet has a luminous and intelligent presence. I think it has more to do with the sound of Shakespeare delivered in American voices. So it isn't Stratford and they aren't speaking with rounded tones. It may not be the most "poetic" sounding verse, but for the purposes of the film, it works. Film, as it should be unnecessary to point out by now, is a very different medium from the stage. The visual, for better or worse, takes precedence. And the visual is what this film delivers — in spades.

Not all of it works equally well. In her first appearance, Lady Capulet is treated as a grotesque, at odds with her later appearances as a Southern belle who has obviously made a bad marriage. As the nurse, Miriam Margolyes initially has moments when she seems like some dreadful Hispanic caricature, but she improves. Mantua, oddly enough, is a derelict trailer park to which the "Post-haste Dispatch" delivery man comes too late. But these are flaws that are easy to overlook when so much is right. Parents should be aware that the film, like the play, is violent and be prepared to explain why Mercutio comes to the Capulet ball in drag. Although in the age of Dennis Rodman and RuPaul, this may not be necessary. Strangely enough, the drugs, particularly the "likeness-of-death" potion that Friar Laurence brews, seem even more plausible in a modern setting.

You may not agree with all of Luhrmann's choices, but he has created a dazzling entertainment that in its own wired, '90s way is true to the spirit of the original. Shakespeare would be fascinated.

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Munsch's *A Promise Is A Promise* on Stage

A Promise Is a Promise. A Geordie Productions and Barbara Poggemiller adaptation of the book by Robert Munsch and Michael Kusagak. At Toronto's Young People's Theatre, March 1997. Cast: Laura Teasdale, Ron Kennell, Julie Tamiko Manning, Glenn Roy.

At Toronto's Young People's Theatre, the mostly-under-ten audience burst into fits of laughter as Allashua (played by Laura Teasdale) pulled fish from a crack in the

ice with much bravado and concentration, each catch followed by a few moments of staggering, flailing attempts to subdue her quarry, climaxing with a loud final whack and self-satisfied strut. The physical comedy, and physicality in general, of this production of *A Promise Is A Promise* by Barbara Poggemiller and Geordie Productions, was one of the highlights of the show, prompting sudden and hilarious responses from the young audience. Laura Teasdale used an expressive face and body to draw out the moments that her audience was most fascinated with: when Allashua was thrown up from the bottom of the sea to the ice surface, her reaction to the cold was cumulative — beginning with a shiver and escalating to an outrageously impossible level of teeth clattering and body shaking, the entire process greatly appreciated by her audience. The Qallipilluit, with an elaborate (but not ornate) costume of three glittering bright wig-covered heads, made effective use of fluid, exact movement to convey its character. The ice creature's movements instigated one long session of stomach-clutching mirth, as it entered Allashua's house, and encountered, for the first time, such things as bread, candy, pillows and tickling.

Rhythm played a large role in the production as well, weaving itself through the fabric of the entire performance, often integral to the physicality of the show. When Allashua finished her crazed convulsing, she began to run home, her wet clothes freezing on the way. A loud drumbeat accompanied her exaggerated running-on-the-spot motion, the beat slowing as she ran more stiffly, until she fell over, frozen, to one last beat of the drum. Later, when the Qallipilluit comes to the house to collect the children, the Father (played by Glenn Roy), true to the original story, occupied the creature with dancing. I don't remember line dancing, complete with waving hats and appropriate music, as a part of the book, but it certainly made for a surprising and marvellously comedic scene. The original book (a collaboration of author Robert Munsch and Inuit storyteller Michael Kusugak) is marked by repetition and rhythm, popular aspects of any children's story, and transfers well to theatre, aided and shaped by the use of the drums, wind chimes and maracas.

Another key element in the success of the production, which was not immediately identifiable, was the lack of theatrical pretense. The actors moved naturally between narration and dialogue, the sea ice surface included vertical parts of the set, and four very young (but large in enthusiasm) members of the audience became part of the cast. The famous "invisible wall" of theatre was not raised, nor was there any direct attempt on the part of directors or actors to sustain audience belief, and the effect of this complete disregard for proscenium-style traditions was phenomenal. It was clearly understood that theatre for children does not need to concern itself with elaborate details of props, costuming and actors' roles in order to facilitate the magic that is live theatre, for the magic exists within the children themselves. This is not to say that the directors were irresponsible or not thorough in their theatrical representation of the text, but that more attention was given to the telling of the story than to a projected perception of the story, which translated into an attention to image, rhythm and expression, resulting in a pleasurable experience of perceiving.

Children seem to be able to enjoy theatre differently than most adults do, engulfing the performance in an almost effortless embrace. When I discussed this

characteristic of theatre + children in an interview with Bob Munsch, he agreed: "in children's theatre, the same wall (the invisible wall between audience and performance) can exist, but children put it around themselves." Observing my fellow audience members, I could attest to this truth. My seven and ten year old cousins fully accepted the Qallipilluit as "real" within the context of the story, although they recognized Ron Kennell (the actor playing Qallipilluit) when he appeared in different roles — without his ice creature costume — at the open and close of the play, and in spite of Kennell's occasional habit of letting two of his heads, constructed as hand puppets, swing loosely, their identity as puppet/costume obvious. Even the audience members who became cast members — Allashua's brothers and sisters — were obviously enthralled and deeply engaged with the production. It was simply assumed that the audience's imagination had great scope, and the actor-audience dynamic facilitated by such an assumption was riveting.

Robert Munsch himself was not involved in the scripting or directing process, his perspective resting on his role as an original co-author, and audience member. In my interview with him, he said that the only quibble he had with the show was the portrayal of the Quallipilluit. I found this somewhat perplexing, having seen the Qallipilluit — in costume, movement and voice — as a definite highlight of the show, and having watched my young cousins respond to Kennell's portrayal of the creature with wide-eyed glee. Munsch's contention, however, seems to be based in a desire to uphold cultural integrity, and raises some interesting questions. He felt that the Qallipilluit were played as witches, in the vein of the evil witch from Snow White. His uneasiness with this interpretation is derived from his understanding of Inuit legend, in which witches of that variety have no place. The presence of evil is more impersonal in Inuit culture; the Quallipilliut, after all, impersonate the danger of the sea, and, as Munsch said, "the land isn't nasty — it just kills you." Kennell's Qallipilluit had a screeching, quasi-whining voice, much more evil witch-like than the "voice that sounded like snow blowing over the ice" from the book. The input of Michael Kusugak, who was involved in this production, and is an Inuit storyteller and co-author of the original book, would enrich this discussion. However, he was on a tour schedule and could not be reached.

Other than the hesitation around the Qallipilluit, Munsch said that he had enjoyed the show. I asked about other performances of his stories, and he talked about occasionally pulling the license from really bad shows. This prompted a discussion of some of the essential elements of a good children's theatre production, one of which is, unarguably, the involvement of the audience with the performance, to some degree and in some manner. Munsch referred specifically to his stories working by involving the audience, and commended the directors and cast of this production for their "wonderful" integration of four children from the audience, making their debut appearances as Allashua's brothers and sisters. The incorporation of these green actors was indeed impressive, and, far from hindering the show, enhanced it. Julie Tamiko Manning, as Allashua's Mother, was the chief facilitator/conductor of the four, which looked perfectly reasonable in the context of the play, because, after all, that's what mothers do! The moment of glory for Allashua's siblings (and a fantastic piece of physical comedy for everyone) came after Allashua had been mostly thawed out, and demanded hot tea with lots of sugar. The children became a tea conveyer belt: Mother held the tea, the child beside her held the milk and the next the sugar. The other two

children were the runners, bringing cups to the line to be filled, to Allashua to be emptied, then around the bed and back to the line of tea, racing giddily in their circle of tea delivery, pushed on by Allashua's squeals, shouts of delight and cries for "more sugar, Alex!"

A few aspects of the production were disappointing: Glenn Roy was a rather mechanical, low-energy Father, the sound effects and music sometimes threatened to obscure actors' voices, and the audience sat through a very long bout of storytelling by Kusugak before the play began. Kusugak is a storyteller, not a performer. He would be appreciated and entertaining in a small room with a fireplace and an audience of about ten people, but his skill was dwarfed by the stage and rows of seating. His stories were wonderful, giving context and culture to the performance, but they went on for longer than even my attention span could bear. When he began yet another story, having been on stage for quite some time, a child in front of me turned to her friend and asked despairingly, "he's gonna talk more?" Despite these few shortcomings, the production was, overall, very well done. The story came alive on the stage in a wondrous interplay of rhythm, narrative, song, dialogue, slapstick, dance and traditional Inuit chants, all laced with a great sense of fun.

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Giant Peach or Big Apple?

James and the Giant Peach. Directed by Henry Selick and Produced by Denise di Novi and Tim Burton. Allied Film Makers. 1995.

This lively screen adaptation of Roald Dahl's popular children's story might give you the sneaking suspicion that the tale itself has followed the "path of the peach" — from Britain to America. Yet unlike the giant peach, which tastes the same on both sides of the Atlantic, this tale has changed its flavour to appeal to an American palate.

Those familiar with Dahl's story will find much of the movie familiar ground. Yet while the book and the movie never seem as dissimilar as apples and oranges, they do invite another comparison — between the Giant Peach and the Big Apple. Randy Newman, who converts Dahl's verse into the film's best song, also adds pieces of his own, most of which praise New York as the city of limitless opportunity. The fantastic journey across the Atlantic becomes another version of the familiar yellow-brick road to the magical city, and this film provides a host of interesting fellow-travellers: a swaggering centipede, a musical Grasshopper, a cowardly worm, a Greta Garbo-like spider who prefers "to be alone," a prim but feisty ladybug, and a Victorian glowworm, who arrives in America exclaiming "God bless the colonies."

On its own terms, this film tells a powerful tale of populism, teamwork, and, at times, unrestricted delight. Like *The Wizard of Oz*'s travellers, James and

his friends find that the journey itself brings the happiness and community they seek. The travellers, in turn, transform New York, allowing all children — regardless of race, class, or gender—to come to the peach, free from the charges of exploiters or the restraints of proprietors.

The populist message, however, brings mixed blessings. Sometimes it crafts interesting foes, such as James's exploitative aunts, or a harpoon-spitting mechanical shark, which pollutes the sea and threatens to suck everything into its consuming jaws. On the other hand, the emphasis on New York creates the film's dullest moments, probably because the journey is more enjoyable than reminders of its destination. The clichéd praise of New York withers beside the sharp, cliché-cutting lines of characters like Miss Spider, whose deadpan one-liner, "my life hangs by a thread every day," will make even an adult laugh. Similarly, the three-dimensional effects of stop-motion animation and the striking color of the sea journey make the long-awaited city lights a disappointment. Enjoying the grasshopper's violin solo, played against a full moon, any viewer can enjoy the journey itself, without ever wondering "When will we get to New York?"

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101 Dalmatians (1996)

101 Dalmatians. Directed by Stephen Herek; written and produced by John Hughes Disney Enterprises/ Walt Disney Pictures/ Buena Vista.

Disney's animated version of Dodie Smith's book was a commercial success upon its original release in 1961, and subsequently has been a favourite with younger viewers since its release several years ago for the home video market. Clearly the corporate aim with this new live-action version is to cash in on the property yet again (the intertextual reference to Disney's earlier *Snow White*, when Cruella gazes at her reflection and asks, "Mirror, mirror, on the wall ..." is hardly unintentional). The only changes to the narrative in this newer version are superficial, or demanded by the differences between live-action and animation. So instead of composing songs, Roger now designs video games (watch for product tie-in coming soon!). Given its solid endorsement of traditional values in the manner of its predecessor, the new *101 Dalmatians* has been one of the biggest Hollywood family films of this recent Christmas season.

The story is rather simple, and has all the ingredients — love interest, broadly defined villains, cuddly animals, and adventure — to appeal to all children. The film's depiction of London invokes the nostalgic appeal of *Mary Poppins* even as it nods to the contemporary. The comforting notion of interspecies communication and cooperation, demonstrated when various barnyard animals assist the dogs in their escape, suggests a harmonious and beneficent nature that is sure to assuage any young child's anxiety about the possible absurdity of the universe.

Certainly the spotted quadrupeds are the star attraction. They perform well and do all the nifty tricks we expect of them. Viewers both young and old are

likely not to notice that there are perhaps only two or three shots showing more than twenty dogs at a time (how many of these are actual as opposed to virtual it is hard to say).

Of the human performers, Glenn Close is the star. Appropriately, she chews up the screen, playing the villainess Cruella de Vil with a broad campiness that admirably incarnates the cartoon character, combined with touches of the madness of Alex in *Fatal Attraction* and Norma Desmond in *Sunset Boulevard.* About the others, the best one can say is that Joan Plowright manages to lend dignity to the stereotyped role of Nanny, and that Mark Williams and Hugh Laurie combine just the right touch of Dickensian menace and *Home Alone*-physical farce to Cruella's henchman, Horace and Jasper (or is it Homer and Jethro?). Unfortunately, however, neither Jeff Daniels, who receives star billing, nor Joely Richardson can do anything with the bland characters of Roger and Anita. The standard disclaimer concluding all Hollywood movies — that any resemblance to actual persons living or dead is purely coincidental — would certainly seem to apply in this case.

Yet this is a direct result of the film's ideological thrust. We can all approve of its updated consciousness of animal rights, but its treatment of birthing and gender is regressive and embarrassing. Roger and Anita fall in love immediately when they meet in the park. Both are dunked in the park fountain by their dogs and so return to Roger's flat to dry their clothes; declaring their new-found love, they kiss, their drying clothes catching fire on the fireplace screen. Immediately we cut to the wedding ceremony, humans and canines alike arranged symmetrically in the frame. This mating ritual is so politically correct that even the classic Hollywood synecdoche of cigarette smoking is missing. It is no coincidence that the movie was directed by Stephen Herek, whose previous credit was the similarly heartwarming *Mr. Holland's Opus.* Imagine this same scenario directed by, say, Adrian Lyne or Paul Verhoeven. Even Spielberg would have given these characters some sense of passion, however adolescent.

Shortly thereafter, baby puppies are born, followed by the revelation that Anita is pregnant (could these people possibly have had ... sex?). During the birth of the puppies — and so, we are to presume, during the human birth to follow as well — the males (Roger and Pongo) patiently wait while women attend Perdita's labour behind closed doors. This vision sets the progress of gender relations back considerably. Many critics have noted the emphasis on traditional gender construction in recent Disney movies (*The Little Mermaid; Pocahontas*), and *101 Dalmatians* is no exception. The human/ canine analogy throughout is a particularly clear instance of Roland Barthes' notion that one of the primary textual operations of bourgeois cultural myth is the representation of culture as nature.

But most viewers are likely neither to notice nor care about this aspect of the movie. Audiences seem to come away satisfied, and 101 merchandising tie-ins are already available in toy stores, McDonald's, even at the candy counter in the cinema where the movie is showing. At this point, it is only a Scrooge who could exclaim "Out, out, damn spot!"

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Announcements / Annonces

Among the Canadian Jewish Book Award winners for 1997 were Anne Michaels, awarded the Martin and Beatrice Fischer Prize in Fiction for her first novel, *Fugitive Pieces* (McClelland & Stewart, 1996); Carol Matas, awarded the Rachel Bessin-Frisch Memorial Prize for Young Adult Fiction for *After the War* (Scholastic, 1996); Manny Drukier, awarded the Koffler Centre President's Prize for his Holocaust biography-memoir, *Carved In Stone* (U of Toronto P, 1996).

The 1996 winner of the Vicky Metcalf award for a body of work was Margaret Buffie, author of *Who Is Frances Rain?* (which won a CLA YA Book Award), *My Mother's Ghost, The Warnings* and *The Dark Garden.*

The National Library of Canada's exhibition "The Art of Illustration" will run until February 1998. The exhibition includes original artwork, draft sketches, storyboards and correspondence, shedding light on the process of combining the work of author, illustrator and publisher. Much of the material, including many illustrations, bibliographies and biographies of individual artists, is also available through the National Library's Home Page at http://www.nlc-bnc.ca.

Several Somerville House publications were honoured recently. *Alphabake: A Cookbook and Cookie Cutter Set*, which includes letter-shaped cookie cutters, a cookbook and cookie sheet, was awarded a 1996 Parents' Choice Award and a National Parenting Publications Award (USA). *Stegosaurus*, from the Tiny Perfect Dinosaur Series, and *Storyclothes: Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, were each awarded a three-star rating by the Canadian Toy Testing Council.

Books Reviewed in this Issue / Livres recensés dans ce numéro