

conflict? The incommunicability trope is now tired. And we've become tongue-tied, too shy to reach out and engage in a dialogue.

Liminality

I'm most interested in the liminal spaces asking to be explored and invested, spaces in-between that essentially defy homogeneity and glib positions of cultural conceit. Are there too few of those spaces left in our theatre? They still exist; they also defy the theatrical tag, pushing towards installation, performance, dance, contemporary circus. The body speaks, yet the body's language is also marked by culture. The body of works considered is just as marked by culture as is the body politic of academia, we the scholars, the teachers, the conveyors, the commentators. How can we open up to each other's national traditions without it feeling like a "corrective" gesture or an obligation? How can it not be political or divisive but rather a "normal" expression of healthy artistic and intellectual curiosity, and perhaps even a courteous exploration into each other's singularities? This curiosity, this desire to defy our biases, to flirt with paradox allows us to engage anew in dialogue. This dialogue can be prompted by conferences, by projects, by renewing positions in Quebec or Francophone theatre practices. Opportunity can prompt collaboration beyond debate, but debate is often necessary to warm things up, to get us all *chauffés à blanc*, in order to truly engage with each other, beyond curiosity, beyond obligation, but rather as a desire to follow through on such a rich set-up for tension, conflict, and some form of dramatic resolution.

Notes

- 1 An edited transcript of this CATR session was subsequently published in *Theatre Research in Canada/Recherches théâtrales au Canada*. See Barker et al.

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Plus Ça Change, the Rest Stays the Same: Perpetual Spring in New Brunswick Theatre

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After a very long and difficult winter down East, the metaphor of perpetual spring seemed particularly apt as I prepared this paper. What I don't mean, as I apply it to theatre in

New Brunswick (hereafter NB), though, is endless days of sweet sunshine and lovely flowers; instead, theatre in NB feels like those first hints of thaw in a terrible winter when one tries really hard to imagine better days but isn't really convinced they'll come. Likewise if we try really hard we might see cracks in the ice and drips of meltwater in the barren landscape, but for theatre in NB, the warmth and flourish of summer seems ever elusive.

The challenge of talking about language and theatre in my neck of the woods is that there is so little theatre to talk about it is pretty difficult to identify trends or general characteristics. NB is the only officially bilingual province in Canada, with the approximately one-third Acadian population demonstrating strong economic and cultural impact on our small province of about 700,000 souls. The linguistic duality governs our systems of health-care, education, and, unofficially, our theatre. As I and others have observed in the past, NB has two pretty much independent and highly differentiated ecologies of theatre: one serving the English population and one the Acadian.

In a 2004 article, optimistically entitled "Building Bridges," I wrote about how these two worlds offered highly contrasting repertoires and aesthetics, and I assessed a number of initiatives that were bridging the great differences and the fundamental isolation of the two. This winter I reviewed those observations and attempted to resurvey the field... I'm afraid to report that my 2004 predictions were overly optimistic. Here are some of my key thoughts about the future at that time:

- I described Live Bait Theatre in Sackville as exhibiting the "stirrings of a sleeping giant" with new theatre space, an enlarged season, developed winter season, and new play development initiatives. Since 2004, LBT has lost its performance space, become financially precarious, while hanging on to the odd summer music revue and Christmas specials. Ever the optimist, however, I must mention that Andrea Boyd as the new artistic director is making serious attempts to revamp the company's direction (and the successful summer show, the world debut of Charlie Rhindress's take on a local murder mystery, *Reader be thou ready* boded well). But in terms of crossing the divide: not so much.
- The Playwrights Atlantic Resource Centre (PARC), another highlight in 2004, has continued to nurture new dramaturgy in the region with the extraordinary talent and efforts of its leadership under Jenny Munday, but no new initiatives for translation.
- Meanwhile Theatre New Brunswick in Fredericton has gone through its own financial and artistic struggles in the past decade, with several Artistic Directors and Artistic Managers. The newest appointment, Thomas Morgan Jones, however, is highly energized and even in the few short months since his arrival has initiated a number of changes and projects.
- The Capitol Theatre School never moved towards pre-professional training but has remained as a source for children's Saturday and summer-camp activities. It at least does run bilingually.

- Notable Acts summer theatre festival continues to produce two weeks worth of original ten-minute and one-act plays, as well as one major production in Fredericton. Since 2004 a few works attempted to bridge the linguistic divide for a few years, but have tapered off.
- Meanwhile on the Francophone side *Théâtre l'Escaouette* continues to program a diversity of regional plays as well as national and international co-productions. Most interesting with regards to the question of the two linguistic worlds of theatre in NB (and considering the history of the company), l'Escaouette has also been producing translations of English plays.

So, like the seemingly never-ending New Brunswick springs, where winter lingers far longer than it is welcome, theatre shows little continuity in its growth from the 2004 survey despite the multitudes of small cracks, glimmers of a warmer future that pop up. However, writing this in the balmy days of late summer it's hard to be entirely pessimistic. The new artistic direction at TNB perhaps has openness to intercultural exchange, certainly l'Escaouette is showing itself open and interested, and other companies continue to survive if not thrive. So while the two solitudes of the English and Acadian theatre systems remain fairly strong, the sincere expressions of goodwill and interest on both sides may bring us better days yet.

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