

## GLEN NICHOLS

### **BUILDING BRIDGES: ENGLISH & FRENCH THEATRE IN NEW BRUNSWICK**

*On ne peut pas vraiment parler d'un système de théâtre au Nouveau-Brunswick. Il y a là deux mondes de théâtre, distincts et indépendants : le théâtre de langue anglaise et le théâtre de langue française. L'histoire, le style, le répertoire et l'infrastructure diffèrent profondément de l'un à l'autre. C'est avec un peu d'ironie, peut-être, qu'on constate que c'est la minorité francophone, qui constitue à peu près 33% de la population de la province, qui a créé les compagnies et la dramaturgie dominantes et produit les artistes les plus importantes. Je me propose d'explorer dans cet article les contextes uniques de la création théâtrale au Nouveau-Brunswick. Je ferai une comparaison détaillée des cinq compagnies théâtrales professionnelles : deux compagnies de langue anglaise (Theatre New Brunswick et Live Bait Theatre) et trois compagnies de langue française (Théâtre populaire d'Acadie, Théâtre l'Escaouette et Collectif Moncton Sable). À la fin, j'offrirai une tentative d'hypothèse pour expliquer les différences importantes entre les deux mondes de théâtre. Tout cela donnera le contexte pour une évaluation de quelques spectacles récents en langue française.*



In 1996 Mary Vingoe commented about how far Atlantic theatre had come since the 1970s when “[a]nything else worth looking at came from elsewhere. Most people wanted to be elsewhere. [...] We are deaf if we live in a place where the voices of our own artists are not heard. In the Maritimes, we have begun to cast off our deafness—life is a great deal richer because of it” (21). While Vingoe’s outlook might be true for Nova Scotia where a number of professional theatre companies produce a range of innovative and original plays, the same cannot be said for English-speaking New Brunswick; however, there is change on the horizon.

It is impossible to speak “generally” of theatre in New Brunswick; there are really two distinct theatre worlds here: English-language and French-language theatre. The histories, styles, repertoires, and infrastructures are strikingly and, perhaps sadly, different and separated. What is perhaps ironic at first glance is that the demographic minority, the francophone population

which comprises approximately 33% of the New Brunswick total, has produced the theatre companies, artists, and repertoire with a greater presence than those of the English-speaking majority. This paper will explore the unique conditions of contemporary theatre production in New Brunswick as context for a closer look at several recent French-language plays. The conclusion will reveal a few hopeful signs in English-language theatre activity in the province.

French-language theatre in New Brunswick is currently driven by three professional companies. The oldest is Théâtre populaire d'Acadie (TPA) which has been based in Caraquet in the north-east corner of the province since 1974. With over 100 productions to its credit, TPA's repertoire, while including important original Acadian creations, has tended to emphasize an international and classical repertoire. TPA has developed a strong tradition of collaboration with Quebecois and international theatre companies.

Théâtre l'Escaouette was formed by a few of the first graduates of the drama program at the Université de Moncton in 1978 and has been based in Moncton ever since. Dedicated originally to works for young audiences which it toured to schools across the province, Théâtre l'Escaouette has shifted to works for a more general audience in the past dozen years, but has not diluted its mandate for creating original plays. The repertoire has been dominated by new works by Herménégilde Chiasson, but has also been enriched by frequent co-productions with companies from central Canada such as the National Arts Centre, Théâtre Vieille 17 and Le Théâtre du Nouvel-Ontario. The company does some touring, particularly in Quebec and central Canada. For example, its remount production of Chiasson's *Pour une fois* was performed in Toronto (February 2004) in a co-production with TPA. Théâtre l'Escaouette was instrumental in the purchase and renovation of a new multi-million-dollar performance space which opened in Moncton in the fall of 2004. This highly anticipated facility fills an important gap in the city's theatre and performance infrastructure.

The newcomer on the professional theatre scene is Collectif Moncton Sable, created in Moncton in 1996. This highly innovative design-based physical-theatre company began by staging works developed in collaboration with poet France Daigle, but in 2002 they produced the stunning text, *Empreintes*, by the young poet and film-maker, Paul Bossé. 2005 was a special year because Moncton Sable brought two productions to the stage: *Linoléum* and *Alors, tu m'aimes*: works that continue to expand the experi-

mental approach of the company. The first was another text by Paul Bossé, which again wove together several time periods and explored the revelation of past mysteries linked to the gradual uncovering of layers of flooring in a Moncton apartment by its current occupants. The other, by first-time playwright Monique Snow, introduced four young actors (Annie LaPlante, Brigitte LeBlanc, Anika Lirette and Marie-Pierre Valay-Nadeau) newly graduated from the Université de Moncton. Like most Moncton Sable productions, *Alors, tu m'aimes* was more lyrical than narrative, more exploratory and evocative than definitive. Built around the theme of love, the fragments or parts of fragments often repeated in later moments with different intonation and different contexts (the actors each played a variety of roles only identified by numbers in the script).

Finally, an overview of French-language theatre cannot avoid including *Le Pays de la Sagouine*, the theme park based on Antonine Maillet's works and located just outside of Moncton in the seaside village of Bouctouche, Maillet's hometown. The site produces highly popular summer theatre and employs a large number of artists. The texts they use include some original sketches each year by Maillet, as well as dinner theatre and street performances. A colossal spectacle entitled *L'Odysée* and also written by Maillet was created in 2004 (and remounted in 2005 and 2006) as part of celebrations marking the 400th anniversary of the first French settlement in North America and the founding of Acadie. The show, involving dozens of volunteer performers and a number of professionals, commemorates significant events from the long history of Acadie.

As for actor-training in French, there is the major conservatory program at the Université de Moncton. Since the 1970s the department has become renowned for high quality training and has been the source of the vast majority of Acadian theatre professionals at work in New Brunswick and beyond today. The impact of the Université de Moncton on the professionalization of Acadie in general, as well as in the theatre, cannot be understated. For the fine arts, and the theatre in particular, the university has provided not only modern training, but also an ever-expanding audience for arts which speak to an increasing diversity of Acadian voices.

New play development takes place at all three companies. Of note, Théâtre l'Escaouette, through their biennial "Festival à haute voix," has attempted to cultivate new theatrical voices. The 2005 version of the festival featured nearly a dozen new plays reflecting a broad range of styles and forms. The direct impact of this initiative

has been remarkable. Already noted above is Monique Snow's *Alors, tu m'aimes*, produced by Moncton Sable, but there has also been the phenomenal success of Mélanie F. Léger's *Roger Roger*, and the award-winning Emma Haché has had pieces developed in the series. There have also been works coming out of the festival that have gone on to be produced independently in the region and beyond in both theatre and film.

English-language theatre in New Brunswick on the other hand, despite the fact the English population is double the size of the francophone minority, is produced by only two professional companies. First is the self-named "provincial" company, Theatre New Brunswick (TNB), which has been based in Fredericton since 1969. TNB is mandated to tour its shows across the province, which it continues to do despite rising costs and shrinking audiences. TNB also supports a young company that tours to provincial schools with theatre for young audiences. In addition there is an in-house theatre school for the general public. Rather than developing collaborations with other national or international companies, Theatre New Brunswick focuses on its own productions, and does not tour outside the province.

Live Bait Theatre, based in Sackville in the south-east corner of the province since 1988, has been largely a summer and seasonal dinner theatre company, but it has been noted for some regional collaborations, especially in recent years. The company is expanding its season and has recently (2004) opened a new permanent performance space in Sackville.

There is no professional conservatory theatre training offered in English in the province, although the three English-language universities, Mount Allison, St. Thomas, and the University of New Brunswick, all support drama-concentrations including practical courses within their English degrees. While the university towns of Sackville and Fredericton do seem to support a high degree of arts and cultural events, a factor undoubtedly related to the presence of the students and faculty in the area, this has not translated into a strong indigenous theatre culture in either city.

Beyond the basic differences in infrastructure, the various theatres in New Brunswick also divide along differences in repertoire, design approaches, and relationship with the community.

The 2003-2004 Theatre New Brunswick season featured four main-stage plays that toured the province: Kim Selody's adaptation of *The Hobbit*; Norm Foster's latest comedy, this one for the Christmas market, called *Dear Santa*; Maureen Hunter's *Vinci* and Dan Needles' *Wingfield on Ice*. With the exception of the Hunter

piece, the season is clearly built around plays with easy accessibility and a high degree of audience familiarity. Only *Vinci* took the audience beyond the well-known and comfortable, but even there, the season flyer touted the play as “Wittily poking fun at religious zealots, [...it] depicts a strong sense of sacrifice and unwavering hope,” comments emphasizing the play’s appeal to a general audience.

The season that just finished (2005-06) looked very similar, with Norm Foster’s newest piece, *Here on the Flightpath*; a children’s Christmas special, *Pinocchio*; a winter musical, *I Love You, You’re Perfect, Now Change*; and Michel Tremblay’s *For the Pleasure of Seeing Her Again*.

Design at TNB focuses on elaborate sets and costumes emphasizing realism and linear “believability.” The company’s regular use of a turntable set frame, for example, enabling rapid set changes when plays call for multiple locations, is indicative of the generally realistic approach.

Live Bait’s dinner theatre and summer season in 2003-04 featured *Beach Party* by local playwrights Jane & Dave McClelland, *Class of ‘73: Reunion*, by Live Bait founders and co-artistic directors Charlie Rhindress & Karen Valanne, and J.J. McColl’s musical, *Menopositive*. Their summer and Christmas fare has remained consistent since then, satisfying an important and dependable audience base. On the other hand, and demonstrating the new and exciting directions the company is taking, Live Bait also produced Don Hannah’s *Fathers and Sons* in its first production in Hannah’s home province, and an original play by Sackville teacher and playwright, Mark Blagrove, *We Happy Few*. Set in a convalescent hospital during the First World War, the play dealt with questions of “the artist’s responsibility to society and the human fallout of war,” to quote the company publicity. The play successfully used innovative environmental staging and non-theatrical lighting to engage the audience in the play’s world.

In the fall of 2005, Live Bait produced the world premiere of Jenny Munday’s *Relatively Harmless*. Sean Mulcahy’s expressionistic set emphasized the surreal aspects of the script, which portrayed the return of a woman to her family home after many years absence to attend the funeral of her father, who had been wheel-chair bound for ten years after suffering a stroke. The play weaves several timeframes as the woman and her family come to terms with the effects of the father’s illness and death on each other and their relationships. The play was theatrically demanding and one can only hope it inspires more productions like it.

On the English side, connections with the community are tenuous. TNB, especially, has been through a notably difficult time in recent years with diminishing audiences and serious financial short-falls. While the worst of that seems to be in the past thanks to generous donations from private and public sources, and audiences are returning, links with the various communities the company tours to vary widely. Live Bait, however, has an enthusiastic following and enjoys solid, if variable, houses. The shift to more demanding plays, though, requires a bit of adjustment. The opening night audience at *Fathers and Sons*, for example, perhaps because the play was offered late in the summer season, clearly anticipated a rollicking comedy and started out laughing at scenes that were not really funny and took awhile to get into the play's tone. At the subsequent production of *We Happy Few*, though, the audiences were still at capacity. There is a strong community connection with the company, which I believe will be enhanced as Live Bait continues to offer a wider variety of theatre options.

On the francophone side, the Théâtre populaire d'Acadie 2003-04 season began with the Canadian première of *Le collier d'Hélène* by Quebec playwright Carole Fréchette; the second TPA-only production was *La sortie au théâtre*, a montage of cabaret sketches by 1920s German expressionist playwright Karl Valentin. The TPA season also featured two plays for young audiences created in co-productions with Théâtre de Papyrus from Belgium: *Hulul* and *La petite ombre*. This second also involved collaboration with Les Gros Becs company from Quebec, a truly multi-dimensional project, described in company publicity as "theatre of surrealist images inspired by the universe of a haunted ship." The company tours its shows across the province and well beyond New Brunswick with the majority of performances increasingly taking place in Quebec, central Canada, and across Belgium and France.

The latest season, 2005-06, continued this trend by featuring two in-house shows, both by the young Acadian Emma Haché, *Les défricheurs d'eau* and *Murmures* (which toured extensively), and hosting four general-audience productions and two for young audiences, all by Quebec companies.

With all the preparations for their new building, Théâtre l'Escaouette only produced two shows in 2003-04, both in co-production. The first was Herménégilde Chiasson's newest play, *Le Christ est apparu au Gun Club*, produced with the Théâtre français of the Centre national des arts. The second was also a new play called *Willy Graf* by franco-Ontario playwright Michel Ouellette. This one was produced with the Centre national des arts again, as

well as with Théâtre de la Vieille 17 in Ottawa. Half the cast and crew were Escaouette personnel and half were from Ottawa. The rest of the season at Théâtre l'Escaouette was filled out with shows on tour from Quebec and France: *Prophètes sans Dieu* by Slimane Benaïssa (Théâtres... l'Été, TILF, Groupe des Vingt and l'Adami); *Le Bible*, a giant puppet show by Théâtre du Sous-Marin Jaune and Théâtre la Bordée; and, finally, *Zazie dans le métro* by Raymond Queneau (Théâtre des Fonds de Tiroirs).

Despite the preoccupations of the renovations and transition, since 2004 the company remounted *Le Christ est apparu au Gun Club* in 2005, which has since toured extensively across Canada. Another play by Chiasson, *La grande séance*, was produced in 2004 (with Théâtre français du Centre national des arts and Théâtre populaire d'Acadie), the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Acadie. The play depicts a theatre company preparing to stage an historical pageant to mark the anniversary.

Design-wise, the French-language theatre companies explore various styles and approaches from the 1920s expressionism of Valentin to a subtle orientalism of *Willy Graf*, which featured sliding paper walls and Japanese-inspired woodcut designs. TPA, especially, is known for developing classically-inspired performances drawn from diverse sources such as *commedia dell'arte* and French neoclassical drama. Meanwhile l'Escaouette (alone and in co-productions) pushes the limits of imagistic theatre in plays like *Pour une fois* and, to a lesser degree, *Le Christ est apparu au Gun Club*. Moncton Sable is, of course, renowned for its innovative design concepts. The earlier thematic treatments of Daigle's work made particular demands. One memorable example was the production of *Foin (Hay)* in which the theatre space was filled with dozens of bales of straw, providing both the audience seating and the setting environment (paper tissues were supplied!). A truly sensory experience, indeed (if one has ever sat on a bale of hay for any length of time!).

For the French-language companies the connection with their communities seems solid, deep, and dedicated. There is a vibrant commitment exhibited by consistently full houses. TPA plays in Moncton at the large Capitol Theatre, for example, and enjoys audiences of several hundred spectators at each performance. There is also large corporate and government support.

From this necessarily superficial overview, it is apparent that New Brunswick contains two independent theatre systems with little to compare except the accident of sharing a geographical space. How does one explain this difference? That is a problem I

have asked many times in my ten years in the province, with little satisfactory explanation. And how does one begin to overcome these differences in developing a more complex and sophisticated theatre system for the English-speaking theatre audience in New Brunswick?

One of the ways of beginning an understanding of or at least an exploration of the differences between the two theatre systems was suggested by Brian Crow's description of post-colonial theatre: "In such post- but neo-colonial contexts dramatists have created theatre for a variety of urgent cultural functions. They have often been concerned to use the stage to define and affirm their people's cultural 'personality'—in the face of continuing cultural, economic, and political subjugation—by recovering the past, freed from the biases of metropolitan or mainstream history" (17). What struck me was how this could describe the French theatre of New Brunswick, but not that of the English community. In an odd and perhaps ironic way, the doubly colonized francophone minority of the province is creating theatre from a more evolved post-colonial position than is the English majority.

One can trace contemporary Acadian dramaturgy through several primary post-colonial models suggested in *The Empire Writes Back* by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin. The first model is that of nationalistic and self-conscious myth-building (16-18), which can be seen in the plays of Antonine Maillet and other pioneers of Acadian theatre concerned with constructing a unified national identity through racial and historical re-centering. It is interesting that she is still writing in that historical mode as demonstrated by the productions at *Le Pays de la Sagouine*. Next is the comparative model that looks at the relationship of two or more colonial positions (18-20). We see this in the later works of Herménégilde Chiasson where he is concerned with the exoticisation of Acadie as seen from Montreal, the neo-colonial centre of French Canada. Finally, the model of hybridity and syncreticity (35-37) is demonstrated in the enthusiastic embracing of co-productions and the internationalism of the repertoires of Acadian theatre companies as well as the interest in historical deconstruction and interrogation of national myths in the plays.

In all honesty, none of these models can be perceived in the English-language theatre repertoire. Part of that may be due simply to the small number of indigenous New Brunswick plays in English. Other than the extremely prolific and popular Norm Foster, whose work shows greater affinity in style and content to Neil Simon and London's West End than to anything recognizably



New Brunswickian, other plays in English do not have the critical mass to establish trends or patterns. Plays like Jenny Munday's adaptations of Herb Curtis's novels, *The Americans are Coming* and *The Last Tasmanian*, and Charlie Rhindress's *Maritime Way of Life* spring to mind as significant high points, but without a strong continuity it is impossible to draw much sense of identity.

One explanation is that the English community, despite its position as the dominant majority, exhibits the effects of colonialization. The historical roots of English New Brunswick in the loyalist diaspora, and the contemporary marginalization of New Brunswick at the geographical and metaphorical margins of a Canadian and North American hegemony, point to a highly colonized positionality. But, and this is crucial to the differences in New Brunswick dramaturgies, the nature of that position is radically different from that of Acadie.

Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, among others, cite two fundamental types of colonial constructions which affect post-colonial reactions: that of the settler/invader and that of the conquered. The first seems to be the model of English New Brunswick. Settler/invader colonies displace or eliminate any indigenous peoples and set about establishing a piece of the "mother-country" in the context of and in resistance to the new foreign home. According to Helen Gilbert, "Settler histories do not simply replicate the master narrative's characteristic tropes; instead, they are often concerned with replicating authenticity for a society dislocated from the imperial centre and, simultaneously, alienated from the local land and indigenous culture" (113). The Loyalist-founded English community of New Brunswick, with a triple alienation, seems to exhibit, at least in the theatre, some hesitancy in developing an indigenous cultural identity. The system, repertoire, and aesthetics of theatre remain stolidly borrowed from the centre (or centres: London, New York, and central Canada), replicating the authenticity of a lost "homeland" or revered metropolis, with only a glimmer of interest in addressing the lack of regional voices.

This lack of indigenous dramaturgy may also have to do with the ability of the English community of New Brunswick to "imagine" itself. While both English and French are small populations spread thinly across a wide area, English New Brunswick does not have the advantage of an identifiable common face, regardless how clichéd or problematic that face might be. The Acadians have the story of the "deportation," mythologized and a source of national narrative, around which to have begun their collective trip back from a colonial past. As of yet, English New

Brunswick has not constructed or been able to imagine that sense of commonality/identity. In its place is a sense of precarious dominance in a marginal landscape.

In addition, the dynamics of the relationship between the two principle communities also inflicts a kind of subtle self-doubt on the English in New Brunswick. On one hand, the incredible gains in economic and cultural security experienced by the Acadians over the past four decades have rebalanced the social fabric of the province, increasing the self-inflicted sense of precariousness in portions of the English community. Compounding this, claims of uniqueness or identity sometimes get confused with reactionary racial or linguistic retrenchment such as that promoted by the late CORE party. The mantra might be, "It is better to be invisible than be mistaken for being rude," so English theatre has tended to disappear inside itself: not sure "who" it is, not able yet to imagine a "self," afraid of offending, and being to some degree intimidated by the Acadian miracle around it.

While the French Acadian community was originally also a settler/invasor colony, it experienced an entirely different history of settlement, expulsion, and return under the English as colonial masters. The result is a society more akin to the model of a conquered people striving to accommodate a mythologized and idealized past in resistance to the presence and domination of an English majority. In addition one could even say Acadie has been colonized from within by the myth of its past. Citing Helen Gilbert again, "plays and playwrights [in conquered societies] construct discursive contexts for an artistic, social and political present by enacting other versions of the pre-contact, imperial, and post-imperial past on stage [...]. Reconstructing the past in this way usually heralds the emergence of new voices and new tools for understanding that past" (106). This is exactly the source of the most contemporary Acadian dramaturgy by the likes of Emma Haché and Paul Bossé, as well as Herménégilde Chiasson's later pieces.

In a paper Chiasson himself presented to the Assemblée générale annuelle de la Fédération culturelle canadienne-française in June of 1996, entitled, "Comment traverser le tain de notre miroir pour atteindre le paradis de la visibilité," he explained at length the difficulty Acadian culture has in combating neo-colonial images produced by an externally-controlled media that often has an agenda contrary to the interests of Acadie. The real problem comes when Acadians themselves begin to suffer from the irreconcilable differences between the reality they are living and the images of

themselves they begin to believe in. As he explains,

Les Acadiens domiciliés au Québec nous ont donné une image folklorique qui fait recette dans les médias et qui les a rendus visible sur le territoire de l'Acadie, au point où une grande majorité des Acadiens s'identifie maintenant à cette vision exotique fondée beaucoup plus sur le mythe que la réalité. (10-11)

Herménégilde Chiasson's 1999 play, *Pour une fois*, which was in the active repertoire of Théâtre l'Escaouette as late as 2004, exemplifies the most sophisticated deconstruction of Acadie's self-obsession with a mythologized past and the battle against the internal and external forces of colonisation. The episodic plot involving Charles Lanteigne, a would-be historian, and his family is a metaphor for the history of Acadie from its beginnings with Samuel de Champlain through to an uncertain date in the (near?) future. The combination of domestic, contemporary characters and historical allusion is Chiasson's vehicle to foreground the troubled connections between history and contemporary life in Acadie. The play's exploration of Charles's gradual alienation from his community and family becomes a metaphor for the collective alienation of contemporary Acadians from mythologized and internalized elements of historical identity of Acadie promoted and re-enforced by the outside world. This play thus depicts the two forces of post-colonial resentment in modern Acadie. Charles Lanteigne's insistence on the historical and cultural priorities of Acadie constantly bump into the more rationalist and economic preoccupations of those around him. Although he ends up marginalized for the actions he takes, the political maturity espoused by the Parti Acadien victory can be seen, partly at least, as a product of his convictions and their effect on those around him. Meanwhile, the multiplicity and hybridity of language layers in the play, coupled with the episodic structure and meta-theatrical framing, imply the complexity of Acadian identity, countering the simplistic mediatized image of neo-colonial Acadie as a unified cultural entity that emphasizes folkloric stereotypes. The integration of collective, individual, theatrical, and thematic aspects marks the maturity of the play as it achieves significance through self-conscious integration of particular, regional material.

A second play of Chiasson's, *Aliénor*, originally created in 1997, was recently (2003) produced in English translation by LIVEWIRE Theatre in Moncton. This poetic play depicts Étienne's unjust accusation of sexual assault of his daughter Aliénor. The

interplay of Étienne and Aliénor creates a powerful allegory for the creation of a post-colonial Acadie, forward looking, but conscious of its foundations. Étienne, like oppressed Acadie, avoids destruction first by escaping from the world to live in the woods, then later by taking on the wrath of the world in a martyr-like resistance to injustice. Aliénor, engendered by her martyred past, becomes a kind of post-colonial Evangeline, a new symbolic paradigm: although raped by the intruders she is able to survive and defeat her opponents by refusing to flee or to be martyred, insisting instead that, “We will be avenged, father, by life” (246). In the end it is Aliénor who prevails. She believes that in building a new world on the ashes of the old “I will never betray the history of our suffering” (246), but “We must bury the past. We must write it down in a book and bury the book. And the dead will read that book and they too will finally be able to sleep” (245).

In September of 2002, Moncton Sable produced *Empreintes* by first-time playwright Paul Bossé, an award-winning poet and film-maker. The remarkable play weaves three plots involving an Australopithecus who sacrifices his life to save his wife and child, a modern-day anthropologist who saves a gorilla from death by boredom, and a *Chiac*-speaking robot who rescues David from the machinations of his techno captors in a future world. From the dawn of prehistory and the first human family, to the present day, to a future when computers have taken over the world, the complex narrative of *Empreintes* explores the traces of human compassion across the millennia. In effect, a play within a play within a play, we watch David watching Lucie watching the ancient events, the three stories folding into each other like contrapuntal strains in a symphony.

The play is remarkable for situating Acadie on a global, pan-historical stage without pretension or apology. Acadie is normalized as an imagined player on a global scale; it is perfectly natural that the researcher in Antarctica should call upon the Centre d'études acadiennes to find a talking-walking robot to help solve his murder mystery. A central feature of the play is the clash of dialects within and beyond Acadie. Again, *Chiac*, the particular dialect of southern New Brunswick, is treated as the normal means of discourse while other dialects of French, especially standardized French, are treated as “other.” The play responds to the internal and external colonization of Acadie, as a place both real and imagined, with a re-centering of language and space that shows a sophisticated post-colonial evolution. The world of the play neither compares itself to otherness, nor expresses any kind of resistant

frustration in the face of a minority position. Acadie simply is what it is, and what it is in the play is an intensely complex, self-conscious, imaginative space, acknowledging but not subordinating itself to its connections with the past, its neighbours, and a fictional global future.

The evolution of modern Acadian drama first constructed a common identity through the self-conscious imagining of an idealized, mythologized past. The raising of history in this way in the plays of Maillet, Jules Boudreau, and Calixte Duguay, for example, served to create an important racial and national identity, but, because the images remained aloof from the reality of Acadian life, it became a kind of hegemonic albatross around the Acadian neck, erasing differences, complexities, and modernizations. Consequently, the theatre has become a site of interrogation of that constructed commonality, exploring the inherent contradictions between the myth and the complex realities of contemporary Acadie. This re-imagining of the social and aesthetic space was achieved by integrating the myths and the way they function into the images of contemporary life and thought. The force of this hybridization laid the foundations for a global confidence that now enables Acadian dramaturgy to reach out to the world and bring the world to Acadie, not as backward colony seeking some kind of justification or approval, but as partner and participant.

On the other side, for the English theatre system to move forward, there is first and foremost the underlying need to imagine a common identity. The English community of New Brunswick, and the theatre that serves it, is split between three rival urban centres and a broad rural hinterland, each with competing needs. There are the constant inter-relations with the French minority within the region and with the larger business and cultural forces from outside the region. While these factors are crucial in the shaping of English culture in the province, so far English theatre has only just begun to deal with or build bridges among these aspects of New Brunswick reality, but has not yet grasped the necessary role it must eventually play in the construction of this identity.

When this paper was first written in the winter of 2003, Scott Burke had recently been appointed the new Artistic Director of Theatre New Brunswick and had made overtures to organize a roundtable or mini-conference to bring together English and French theatre personnel from across the province. This kind of face-to-face exchange could have been an important first step in shrinking the gap that currently exists between the practitioners in

the two systems. Alas, such a meeting never took place and Burke left TNB after only two years. His successor, Claude Giroux, only remained in the office for one season and, as of the spring of 2006, Leigh Rivenbark, former Associate Artistic Director, is filling in. Once this period of instability, which reaches the administrative levels as well, is in the past one can hope for renewed leadership from TNB.

Live Bait Theatre, though, has shown the stirrings of a sleeping giant lately. With a new performance space and the beginnings of a winter season, the company is building on its interest in new play development. While original play creation is not new to Live Bait, the recent extensive and extended collaborations with Playwrights Atlantic Resource Centre, including the writer-in-residenceship of Jenny Munday, shows a seriousness and integration with tremendous promise for New Brunswick theatre development, both in terms of dramaturgy and audience building.

Equally exciting is the NotaBle Acts Summer Theatre Festival in the capital city of Fredericton. The festival is entering its fifth successful year, having doubled its length to two full weekends in July and August. Dedicated to the development of original plays, the festival provides a range of mechanisms for emerging and established writers, including showcase productions, contests for short plays and one-acts, workshops, public readings, and audience feedback sessions. Since the demise of the Brave New Words program at TNB a number of years ago, new play development in English has been very limited, making the emergence of NotaBle Acts a very promising sign. The festival is building not only a strong reputation but also an important body of new works. One can only hope that, like Théâtre l'Escaouette's Festival à haute voix, this work will begin to translate into new companies and full productions, and will begin to have an impact upon the shaping of an identity for English New Brunswick and its culture.

Finally, the Capitol Theatre in Moncton, although primarily a roadhouse, has established a bilingual theatre school to complement, eventually, the kind of conservatory training at the Université de Moncton. Underlying the foundation of this school are important collaborative links in both linguistic communities, as well as with business and the municipality, within and beyond the region. The timeline for the full implementation of the school is not yet confirmed, but if it does come to fruition it will be a crucial element in the long term growth of indigenous professional English language theatre in the province. ❁

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