



# Modern Canadian Plays

From Talonbooks



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*Modern Canadian Plays* is the core text for university-level Canadian drama courses around the world.

Now in its fifth edition, the two-volume *Modern Canadian Plays* drama series anthologizes major Canadian plays written and performed since 1967. Volume two presents Canadian plays written over the past twenty-five years. These plays respond directly or indirectly to the events of our time; work effectively on the stage, on the page, and in the classroom; and are contextualized with accompanying history, biography, and criticism—all in one place for a reasonable price!

*Polygraph* (1988) by Robert Lepage and Marie Brassard

*7 Stories* (1989) by Morris Panych

*Never Swim Alone* (1991) by Daniel MacIvor

*The Glace Bay Miners' Museum* (1995) by Wendy Lill

*Counter Offence* (1996) by Rahul Varma

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*The Adventures of Ali & Ali and the axes of Evil* (2005) by Marcus Youssef, Guillermo Verdecchia, and Camyar Chai

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*BIOBOXES: Artifacts of Human Experience* (2007) by Theatre Replacement

*The Edward Curtis Project* (2010) by Marie Clements

*Kim's Convenience* (2011) by Ins Choi

Professor of English and theater at the University of British Columbia, **Jerry Wasserman** has written and lectured widely on Canadian theater and theater history, modern fiction, and blues music.

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## Editorial Review

### About the Author

Professor of English and theater at the University of British Columbia, Jerry Wasserman has written and lectured widely on Canadian theater, modern fiction, dramatic literature, theater history, and blues music; edited the two-volume anthology *Modern Canadian Plays*, a standard course text now in its fifth edition; made more than two hundred appearances on stage, film, and television; and served for more than fifteen years as a drama critic on CBC Radio. He is currently the editor of Vancouverplays.com, an informative Web site that provides up-to-date listings and reviews of local theater performances. Wasserman grew up in New York City and attained an M.A. in English from the University of Chicago and a Ph.D. from Cornell, specializing in twentieth-century literature and drama. He started teaching at the University of British Columbia in 1972; though his initial research focus was on fiction, his work in the theater as an actor soon led him to teach mainly drama courses, eventually creating a course in Canadian drama.

In addition to his scholarly accomplishments, Wasserman continues to maintain a busy career as an actor. A seasoned veteran on the Vancouver theater scene, he has also appeared in numerous feature films and major television series.

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### Preface

When Volume One of this fifth edition was published in 2012, I began by noting the significance of certain events and phenomena affecting Canada and the world since the fourth edition of *Modern Canadian Plays* appeared in 2000: the 9/11 attacks and their aftermath; the legalization of same-sex marriage in Canada; the nation's rapidly and radically changing demographics; the economic meltdown of 2008; the climate change crisis; the ascension of a Conservative federal government; the digital revolution. Plays emerge from within specific socio-historical milieus, and recent history is one of the primary filters through which we see the world – and see and read plays. We need to be aware of our filters and those of our artists. I argued that live performance was paradoxically more important than ever in the age of iPhones, Twitter, and YouTube, as a means of keeping us in touch – sometimes literally – with our culture, its stories, and each other. I also asserted the value of the traditional printed book in the form taken by *Modern Canadian Plays*. Our aim is to offer an efficient, functional toolkit for learning and teaching, reasonably priced, easily accessible, providing historical, biographical, and critical contexts, with wide, empty margins that allow for interactivity between reader and text that requires only a pencil or pen.

Nothing that has occurred in the year since Volume One appeared has made me think otherwise about any of these matters. The same fundamental principles apply here in Volume Two. The sixteen compelling plays in this volume, dating from 1988 to 2011, record a wide range of the theatrical stories that Canadian playwrights have told during the past quarter-century. The major difference between this volume and all its previous incarnations is that the broad swath of life, history, and experience it dramatizes can no longer accurately be said to come from the Great White North.

Anthologies are always only a particular selection of the genre being anthologized. An almost infinite number of Canadian play collections is possible, each based on a different set of purposes, tastes, and assumptions, all shaped by strong doses of the anthologist's subjectivity. Following the same criteria that

have guided every previous version of this text, I have chosen plays that I believe work effectively on the stage, on the page, and in the classroom; intelligent, provocative works that have made an impact on audiences and critics in Canada and often abroad; plays worth reading and rereading, staging and restaging. I have also looked for gender balance, some regional distribution, and variation in subjects, styles, themes, and tones. Ethnic diversity was the key additional factor that kept asserting itself as I sought the combination of texts for this volume that met all those other criteria and most excited me. So many of the finest Canadian plays of the past quarter-century tell intercultural stories generated from the multiplicity of backgrounds that make up what Guillermo Verdecchia, in his 1993 play *Fronteras Americanas*, eloquently calls “this Noah’s ark of a nation.”

One of the hardest things about putting together an anthology is deciding what not to include, and the wealth of recent Canadian drama made that task particularly onerous this time around. I could easily have contrived a second volume of twenty or twenty-five plays if the contingencies of publishing had allowed it. Still, I am thrilled to have been able to expand Volume Two from twelve plays in the previous edition to sixteen here, making a total of thirty-one plays in this fifth edition, up from twenty-four in the fourth. And I absolutely love the material in this book.

Five plays in this volume return from the fourth edition while eleven are entirely new to Modern Canadian Plays. Returning are Robert Lepage and Marie Brassard’s *Polygraph*, a play that marked the fall of the Berlin Wall – one of the originary moments of our age – and the global ascension of Robert Lepage; Morris Panych’s existential breakout comedy, *7 Stories*; Daniel MacIvor’s classic examination of masculinity, *Never Swim Alone*; George F. Walker’s bleakly hilarious *Problem Child*, the play that kicked off the triumphant second phase of his career; and Djanet Sears’s *Harlem Duet*, her revisioning of *Othello* that has generated more scholarly responses than anything else in this volume. Here for the first time are Wendy Lill’s Cape Breton love story, *The Glace Bay Miners’ Museum*, which became a Genie Award-winning film; Rahul Varma’s Montreal murder mystery of clashing ethnicities, *Counter Offence*; Ronnie Burkett’s astonishing puppet play about AIDS, vampires, and Jesus on the Alberta prairie, *Street of Blood*; Joan MacLeod’s powerful portrayal of female bullying, *The Shape of a Girl*; Robert Chafe’s *Tempting Providence*, an elegant Newfoundland history play; Wajdi Mouawad’s remarkable Lebanese-Québécois journey through civil war and family mysteries, *Scorched*, also an Oscar-nominated film (*Incendies*); Marcus Youssef, Guillermo Verdecchia, and Camyar Chai’s scathing post-9/11 political satire, *The Adventures of Ali & Ali and the aXes of Evil*; Linda Griffiths’s suffragist comedy, *Age of Arousal*; Theatre Replacement’s unique reconceptualization of the audience-stage relationship, *BIOBOXES: Artifacts of Human Experience*; Marie Clements’s examination of history and photography through an Aboriginal lens, *The Edward Curtis Project*; and Ins Choi’s phenomenally popular immigrant family play, *Kim’s Convenience*. If these plays comprised a single theatrical season, it would be the most extraordinary season ever mounted in a Canadian theatre. Prepare yourself for a banquet – a delicious, enthralling smorgasbord of plays. Read them with your imagination wide open.

Once again this volume begins with a general introduction tracing my particular selective history of Canadian theatre over the past century or so to more or less the present day. This history presents a linear, evolutionary, nationalist-oriented genealogy – “regimented,” in Alan Filewod’s term – a schema that many of my fellow Canadian theatre historians reject.<sup>1</sup> Feel free to use parts of it, argue with it, or ignore it. Deregiment it as much as you like. I believe it represents a useful version of Canadian theatre history, one of the only such versions in print. Consider the introductions to each of the playwrights and plays in both this volume and Volume One as addenda to the general introduction and correctives to some of its omissions. Once again we include a lengthy bibliography of books on modern Canadian drama, plus critical material and a range of reviews specific to each playwright and play; many of the newspapers and reviewers cited in the bibliographies recur multiple times and invite critical examination of their own logic and aesthetics. New to this volume are production photos for two plays. Because of the unique ways in which the scripts of *Street*

*of Blood* and *BIOBOXES* are tied to their original productions, we include illustrative photos to help readers understand the staging of these two plays. Production photos and YouTube video snippets of most of the other plays are available online.

This new edition of *Modern Canadian Plays*, vol. 2, would not have been possible without the provocation and inspiration of my students and colleagues in the Department of Theatre and Film and the Department of English at the University of British Columbia; my superb research assistants, Sarah Banting, Martha Herrera-Lasso Gonzalez, and Petra Klupkova; the UBC Dean of Arts office, which helped fund their research and mine; my excellent editor, Ann-Marie Metten; Greg Gibson, Les Smith, Erik Johnson, Chloë Filson, and all the Talon staff who helped with this book; Talonbooks' astute publishers, Kevin and Vicki Williams; and the love of my life, Sue Wasserman. Canadian theatre is made possible by thousands of men and women who are criminally underpaid and whose artistry and hard work often go unrecognized. This book is dedicated to them: the writers, actors, directors, designers, dramaturgs, stage managers, carpenters, publicists, and all their colleagues who toil for the love of theatre in Canada.

Jerry Wasserman  
Vancouver, British Columbia  
July 2013

<sup>1</sup> Alan Filewod, "Named in Passing: Deregimenting Canadian Theatre History." *Writing and Rewriting: National Theatre Histories*, ed. S.E. Wilmer (Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2004): 106–26.

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Gilbert Kimmel:**

Nowadays reading books be than want or need but also turn into a life style. This reading addiction give you lot of advantages. Associate programs you got of course the knowledge the rest of the information inside the book which improve your knowledge and information. The knowledge you get based on what kind of guide you read, if you want have more knowledge just go with knowledge books but if you want sense happy read one with theme for entertaining for instance comic or novel. Typically the *Modern Canadian Plays* is kind of publication which is giving the reader unpredictable experience.

#### **Virginia Carter:**

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#### **Shirley Parker:**

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**Richard Byrnes:**

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