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Introduction: Diversity on the Stage

English-Canadian Drama in the New Millennium

English-Canadian Drama has a long history and its beginnings go back to the 18th century. However, what is called "professional Canadian theatre," only noticeably developed in the second half of the 20th century. Before that, Canadian theatre had plays produced by amateur companies and theatres, but was mainly dominated by plays from English, American and French authors that toured Canada.

A milestone for the emergence of an indigenous Canadian drama scene and the establishing of a professional Canadian theatre was the founding of the Canada Council in 1957, which promoted and subsidized Canadian playwrights, festivals and competitions. Yet, 1967, the year of the Centennial of Confederation, the World Fair in Montréal and the first and, unfortunately, also the last All-Canadian Dominion Drama Festival, is still considered the key date in the development of modern theatre in Canada. After that, Canadian drama went through various stages to become what it is today, an independent, dynamic and diverse genre recognized in Canada as well as internationally, with Canadian plays translated into other languages and produced around the world.¹

The centennial instilled in many Canadians a national self-consciousness and a hitherto unknown strong feeling of national pride. They became interested in Canadian topics and matters and the decade that followed was dominated by a search for identity and a view towards what it means to be Canadian. Thus, in the 1970s many plays dealt with Canadian issues trying to contribute their share to a definition of a Canadian identity and authors confronted their audiences, for example, with historical themes, immigration or the conflict between English and French Canada, but they also thematized regional aspects, as, for example, life in the North or in the prairies and the influence nature and the vastness of the country have had on people’s lives and thinking.

However, from the 1980s on, Canadian authors started to turn more and more to universal themes, but, above all, reflected in their plays the growing ethnic and social diversity of Canadian society. In 1972, Pierre Elliot Trudeau, Prime Minister at the time, proclaimed the policy of multiculturalism, which was officially incorporated into the Canadian constitution in the 1980s. With the influx of the so-called "new Canadians," particularly from Southeast Asia, China, and the Caribbean, a multiplicity of races, languages and cultures became a prominent characteristic of Canadian society.¹

¹ For more or less comprehensive surveys of contemporary Canadian Drama and further relevant articles and publications, see Antor (2005); Glaap (2003; 2005a; 2005b); Knowles and Riley (2017); Nothof (2008); Wasserman (2008; 2012; 2013). See also Ric Knowles’s book series Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English (CPCTE), whose twenty-one volumes dealing with diverse topics were published from 2005-2011 by Playwrights Canada Press, and New Essays in Canadian Theatre (NECT), the series that replaced it in 2011, with already eight volumes so far.
In the final two decades of the 20th century, plays by First Nations authors, African and Asian playwrights or Jewish and Latino writers came to the fore, works by people that had been socially excluded and historically marginalized for decades. Voices that had been almost silent before were now produced and could be heard. Also gay and lesbian plays contributed to the picture of a multifaceted Canadian culture and inclusive society. What began in the final two decades of the 20th century has now become a trademark of Canadian drama in the new Millennium: diversity (see Glaap 2005c).

Although the beginning of a new century suggests having a look at how Canadian Drama has developed in the past twenty years, it is needless to say that this date has not meant a radical change, but rather illustrates that the present state of Canadian Drama only reflects a continuing development. Although the different articles in this focus section do not provide a comprehensive view of the multiple fields of present Anglo-Canadian Drama, they nevertheless offer insights into a kaleidoscope of the most prominent recent trends and developments of forms and themes, both Canadian and universal in scope and they also look at stylistic approaches to dramaturgy and new productions of plays. The contributors form a choir of different voices, seven scholars and experts in their fields from Canada and Germany and three distinguished Canadian playwrights who express their very personal and individual views and perspectives.

Performing the 21st Century

The articles all focus on individual fields, but, nevertheless, they also complement each other and now and then overlap. This applies, in particular, to the introductory article by Jessica Riley. She enters the stage and opens the scene with her prologue, an article that provides an overview of central developments in Canadian Drama of the past twenty years. She presents and discusses a range of 21st-century works of Canadian theatre both in light of the dramaturgical legacies of the 20th century and in relation to emerging performance creation methods and theatrical forms. Tracing inherited and evolving conceptions of realism and the real, documentary theatre and collective creation, interdisciplinary theatre, and culturally specific and intercultural dramaturgies, Riley demonstrates the ways in which a diverse range of theatre-makers have broadened the scope of what (and how) theatre can mean in 21st century Canada. Thus, she prepares the readers for what they can expect in the following articles.

Birgit Däwes, in her contribution on indigenous drama, outlines a survey of the characteristics and major developments within First Nations theatre and drama in Canada over the past fifteen years. Arguing that the turn of the millennium does not mark a divide or point of rupture for this genre, the article highlights lines of continuity among an ever-growing number of professionally trained Native playwrights, dramaturgs, actors, actresses, directors, and companies. Taking as her point of departure an exemplary, more detailed analysis of Keith Barker’s play The Hours That Remain, she addresses works by Tomson Highway, Drew Hayden Taylor, Yvette Nolan, Marie Clements, Cliff Cardinal, and others in order to demonstrate how the personal is always political in Native Canadian drama, and how the aesthetic innovations and temporal structures of these plays present Indigenous knowledges to diverse, inter- and transcultural audiences.
Asian-Canadian Drama is another prominent field in present Canadian theatre, but a rather young facet of the Canadian theatre scene, although it had its beginnings already in the first half of the 20th century. Back then, however, it mainly focused on its own traditional theatrical forms and themes such as, for example, traditional Cantonese operas. In fact, plays written by Asian-Canadians about their lives and experiences as immigrants and citizens in Canada drawing on western forms of theatre traditions did not really show until the 1980s. Thus, the 1983 Canasian Artist Group production in Toronto of Yellow Fever, a play by the Japanese-Canadian Rick Shiomi, is still considered pivotal in the emergence of Asian-Canadian Drama. Yet, even after this widely recognized performance, it took almost twenty years for such plays to slowly develop into a visible sub-field in the Canadian Drama landscape, despite the foundation of theatre companies and projects such as the Carlos Bulosan Theatre in 1982 or the Cahoots Theatre Project in 1983 and an increasing number of productions of new plays, especially in the 1990s. Around the turn of the new millennium, however, Asian-Canadian Theatre started to pick up momentum. For example, in 2000, the Vancouver Asian-Canadian Theatre was established, a non-profit company that sought to produce plays for the city's large Asian-Canadian population and intended to "attract Asian-Canadian audiences to performances that reflect their community and history, and to provide opportunities for Asian-Canadian theatre practitioners" (Vancouver Asian Canadian Theatre, 2018). Two years later, in 2002, fu-GEN, the first professional Asian-Canadian theatre company was founded in Toronto with a similar mandate

[…] to produce works of Asian North American playwrights and to foster new works by emerging playwrights, but also to explore and address issues of Asian North American's societal roles, responsibilities and identity in the past, present and future. (fu-GEN, n.d.)

Finally, in 2010, the first conference on Asian-Canadian Drama, hosted by fu-GEN, took place in Toronto, indisputably a milestone towards the visibility of a distinct Asian-Canadian drama and a forum that appeared like a stocktaking of the state of the art. As a matter of fact, a year before, in 2009, Nina Lee Aquino had published Love + Relaistships, the first two-volume anthology ever of Asian-Canadian plays which had been performed and produced since the 1980s. The label 'Asian-Canadian Drama,' however, still seems to be a term "under construction." Ric Knowles even calls it a "fraud term," since Asian does not really describe a "pre-existing entity in the world" (Aquino and Knowles 2011b, viii). In Britain, for instance, it primarily refers to people from the Indian subcontinent, who are called South Asians in Canada as opposed to East Asians, such as Chinese-Canadians, Japanese-Canadians or Korean-Canadians, for example. Moreover, he sees the term still connected with pre-existing stereotypes. Nevertheless, it can be considered a useful umbrella term that gives "the field a name" (VII) and supports its recognition in the Canadian theatre scene.

Eury Colin Chang introduces the readers to two very recent performances in Asian-Canadian Drama that deal with one of the most central questions Asian-Canadians are concerned with, viz. the issue of 'redress,' i.e. compensation offered by the Canadian government for past wrongs and injustices. Chang's first performance analysis focuses on Japanese Problem, a co-authored play created in a collective process which had its premiere in Vancouver in 2017, and the second analysis discusses No Foreigners, also a collaborative work, mainly written by David Yee, a young Chinese-Canadian
playwright from Toronto, and by Milton Lim, a Vancouver-based theatre director, designer and multi-disciplinary performer, and co-produced by fu-GEN. *No Foreigners* employs digital imagery and media technology and deals with questions of belonging and cultural expectations.

Another exciting field of theatrical production and dramatic writing in contemporary Canada is African-Canadian theatre. Black performance has a long history in Canada, but similar to Native Canadian and Asian-Canadian Drama, African-Canadian drama has had to fight to be recognized. Although the playwrights are Black Canadians, there is no single definition of African-Canadian theatre, because its members hail from a cosmopolitan background and speak with a multiplicity of voices. They come, for example, from the African Diaspora, Britain, the Caribbean or Canada. African-Canadian dramaturgy, in all its diversity, shows forms of re-iterations from verse drama to the vernacular rhythms of dub theatre. Central themes in African-Canadian plays are, for example, questions of identification, home and belonging, but often the intention is to "rework a historical moment in order to challenge historical oppressions, exclusions and atrocities through enactments of cultural memory" (Moynagh 2005, xii).

Against this background, George Elliot Clarke, an award-winning black-Canadian playwright, poet and novelist from Nova Scotia, in his article outlines his very personal choice of a Decalogue of African-Canadian plays. Clarke opens his article with a kind of prologue that not only prepares his readers for his subjective selection of plays, but also for its "polyphony" (47). Clarke is convinced that drama provides the best window on a culture and that to examine a play is to undertake a "cultural vivisection" that reveals the "whole body of a culture" (47). Although most of the plays he introduces originate from the second half of the 20th century, Clarke has chosen them because he sees them as groundbreaking milestones for the development of African-Canadian Drama in Canada and they have all been produced and remounted in the past twenty years.

Reactions to plays that deal with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have often been as diverse as the people they are concerned with. Especially in large western theatres, this controversial topic for a long time was only marginally considered and at times even regarded as taboo. Only in recent years has the situation started to change globally and plays dealing with this topic have become more recognized with theatres. Still, when the playwrights Stephen Orlov, a Jewish-Canadian, and Samah Sabawi, who is of Palestinian-Australian descent, looked for plays to include in their anthology *Double Exposure: Plays of the Jewish and Palestinian Diaspores*, published in 2016, they found that not many playwrights had "tackled the conflict onstage" (Orlov and Sabawi 2016, xiv). In fact, as Karen Hartmann writes in her introduction to this anthology, "[t]he twin pitfalls of writing about Israel and Palestine are: 1) nobody cares, and 2) everyone is offended" (Hartmann 2016, xix).

Ten years earlier, in 2006, the Jewish-Canadian playwright Jason Sherman edited an anthology, entitled *Modern Jewish Plays* although he had been skeptical right from the beginning, well aware of the difficult situation for Jewish plays at theatres in Canada. He wanted to include plays in his collection that had something in common. To his surprise, the playwrights he could find seemed to have "a shared interest in writing politically-charged plays about a tiny piece of land in a part of the world that has been, for the last half-century, the source of much misery for the people who live..."
in it, and the source of much commentary from those who don’t” (Sherman 2006, 363).
The plays had hardly made it to a mainstream theatre and Sherman’s experience was
that large theatres were afraid of losing their subscribers if they produced "imagined
controversies,” especially about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Sherman 2006, 363).
When he was asked how, from his point of view, plays on Jewish issues had been
received in Canada, he could still only say: "They tend to excite a mixed bag of
emotions, including anger” (Sherman qtd. in Glaap 2008, 127).

In his essay in this focus section, Sherman talks about his own Jewish plays or, as
he prefers, his plays that feature Jewish characters, the diverse reactions to these plays
and about the difficulties to get them produced in large theaters in Canada. Sherman
expresses very personal thoughts in his article, ideas and experiences from a dramatist's
point of view focusing on his experiences as a Canadian writer with a Jewish
background. His essay is very honest and sounds appalled at times, perhaps slightly
frustrated, but he wants to make a point. It is also a critical political statement.

Queer theater is another thriving field in Canadian Drama that adds to the notion
diversity in the Canadian theatre landscape. In his article, Michael Heinze shows that
"queer visibility on the Canadian stage has not only increased, but also diversified” (69).
He discusses the question of identity and traces the development of LGBTQ in
Canada from the 1970s to the present by focusing on award-winning playwrights and
their plays from across Canada and by taking Buddies in Bad Times Theatre in Toronto
as an illustrative example of a queer theatre. He takes a closer look at the two
playwrights Brad Fraser and Sky Gilbert and discusses, for example, Fraser’s Cold Meat
playwrights and lesbian themes have also been present on Canadian stages for quite
some time and Ann-Marie MacDonald, Hope Thompson and Lois Fine are only three
names to be mentioned here. Heinze broadens his scope to Québec theatre with Michel
Tremblay, Michel Marc Bouchard and Steve Galluccio and also shows that "Indigenous
theatre can add to the polyphony of LGBTQ” (76). Today, queer themes are firmly
established in modern Canadian theatre as well as in Canadian society.

Guillermo Verdecchia, an Argentinian-Canadian playwright, does not discuss his
own plays in his contribution to this focus section, but he introduces the readers to two
adaptations of 'classics' he was involved in, as an actor in Toronto's Soulpepper
production of Animal Farm and as the director of an adaptation of Chekov's Cherry
Orchard. Verdecchia complains that even today the programming of many large
theatres in Canada relies "on 'tried and tested' names” (81) and theaters tend to produce
'classics' and familiar works. Thus, many Canadian playwrights seem to turn to
adaptations and the 'borrowing' of European texts and plays has become popular.
Intertextuality is a characteristic of Canadian plays today and the European texts are
used as blueprints for dealing with topical Canadian problems and questions. Indian
Arm by Hiro Kanagawa, the winner of the Governor General's Literary Award for
Drama in 2017, is only one recent example. The play is a modern version of Henrik
Ibsen's lesser known play Little Eyolf and is set on native land in Indian Arm, an inlet
in British Columbia. A Norwegian play encounters a Canadian topic and Native people
encounter white settlers.

Verdecchia discusses two productions, both produced in 2018: Anthony
MacMahon's adaptation of George Orwell's Animal Farm for Soulpepper Theatre in
Toronto and Sarena Parmar’s *The Orchard (After Chekhov)*, her ‘transplant’ of Chekhov's Cherry Orchard for the Shaw Festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Verdeccchia explains that they “felt Orwell's novella was a fable exposing the deceptions and falseness of actually-existing communism. Our revision then would be a fable exposing the deceptions of actually-existing capitalism” (82).

Sarena Parmar’s adaptation of Chekhov’s Cherry Orchard is set in British Columbia’s Okanagan Valley, the fruit basket of Canada and instead of in the early 20th century, the play now takes place in the 1970s. The characters are not a “fading aristocratic Russian family,” but Parmar introduces the Basran family farm where three generations of Sikh farmers, originally from Punjab, live and work. The play is concerned with issues of home and belonging. It focuses on the characters and deals with the experience of being a minority in a multicultural society.

French-Canadian drama, too, has a long history and it is a dynamic and very active genre on the Canadian theatre scene. Therefore, although this special issue focuses on English-Canadian drama, it also has a chapter on French-Canadian drama in English translation. Nicole Nolette’s article is a survey of Québec theatre translated into English in the new millennium (2000-2015) and it vividly illustrates how intensive this intercultural migration of plays is. Nolette covers the major translators and translated authors of the period, including summaries and critical receptions of their plays in translation. She, too, draws on the last decades of the 20th century and first addresses the three top authors from the 1990s (Michel Tremblay, Michel Marc Bouchard and Robert Lepage). In the second part, she focuses on three new artists frequently translated in the new millennium: Wajdi Mouawad, Larry Tremblay and Carole Fréchette. Finally, a third section evokes new currents in translated theatre from Québec, from women writers to theatre for young audiences and the return to the text of thirty-something or Trentenaire drama.

Albert-Reiner Glaap, a fervent pioneer in introducing Canadian Drama to German scholars, audiences and theatres, has contributed numerous publications to research in the field. In his article, he regrets that “Canadian plays in German theatres […] are still exceptions to the rule” (105). Glaap looks at recent Canadian plays that can be of interest to German theaters, their audiences and to directors in particular. Guidelines for his choice are, for example, the ways in which the plays give an insight into multicultural Canada, whether the topics and issues of the plays mean anything to a German audience or whether they have any relevance to their lives. He also chose the plays according to their dramatical concepts and with a regard as to whether they "can set new directions for theatrical activities” (106). Among the plays he suggests are *Watching Glory Die* by Judith Thompson, *Life after God* by Michael Lewis Mac Lennan, *East of Berlin* by Hannah Moscovitch and *Carried away on the Crest of a Wave* by David Yee.

Although this focus section does not explicitly focus on drama in education, its final article by Albert Rau is pedagogical in nature and deals with Canadian plays for young audiences, a special field of the Canadian Theatre landscape that tackles issues young Canadians as well as teens around the world have to cope with. These plays are designed to tour the schools of the country and try to build up a close relationship between audience and actors asking students to imagine familiar places of action and to focus on the dialogue and the characters' behavior and mime. Often they are complex and thought-provoking tales about appearances and preconceptions, stereotypes and
prejudices. From its roots in children's literature, Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) has developed a unique style of drama which is both entertaining and educational. Among the many subjects of recent TYA plays have been divorce, alcoholism and racism but also lack of self-esteem, peer-pressure and suicide. The article briefly traces the history of Canadian plays for young audiences and takes a closer look at plays written and performed in the past twenty years.

On 1 July 2017 Canada celebrated its 150th anniversary as an independent nation and a respected and acknowledged place in the world community which is considered one of the best countries to live in. This year is also a moment to look back at fifty years of professional theater in Canada. Already at the beginning of the new millennium, it was commonly agreed that "Canadian Drama has come of age" (see Glaap 2005b; cf. Antor 2005, 280), presenting a dynamic and vital theatre scene that deserves every bit of international acclaim it gets. At present, for example, the Playwrights Guild of Canada, founded in 1972, has more than 900 members, and the number is growing.

The articles in this focus section stress the notion of diversity and they draw from the past, describe the present and look ahead into the future. They all show that 21st-century Canadian Drama does not mean that a new page has been turned for a new chapter, but rather that the story of Canadian Drama continues and today the Canadian theater landscape has become more diverse and colorful than ever before.

**Works Cited**


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