

knows that participation so willingly given must be valued by making a difference to the play. Our help is needed and if it were not for the password that we have created, things might have turned out very differently. There are other sorts of activities for the audience and I still have problems with what O'Toole (1976) calls "peripheral" participation but it works well with this age group who love to help. The play uses language beautifully, it never condescends nor does it pander in any way and for these great blessings we are all very thankful. Recommended? Yes. And with a teaching pack to go along with it and perhaps a classroom visit from the earthling before the show, we might have something very good indeed both in terms of theatre and of education!

References

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REALISM, FABLE AND WOMEN PIONEERS

The fisherman's revenge. Michael Cook. Playwrights Canada, 1985. 81 pp., \$7.95. ISBN 0-99754-385-5; **Love and work enough**. Collectively created by Nightwood Theatre and Theatre Direct. Conceived and edited by Peggy Sample. Copsycript. Distributed by Playwrights Union of Canada. 29 pp., \$5.00. ISBN 0-88754-431-2. [First produced: Nightwood Theatre and Theatre Direct, Ontario, 1984]; **The bittersweet kid**. Peggy Thompson. Copsycript. Distributed by Playwrights Union of Canada. 33 pp., \$5.00. [First produced: Green Thumb Theatre for Young People, B.C., 1982].

Michael Cook's *The fisherman's revenge* is more than a fairy tale with a moralistic ending. In fact, the virtuous message of the play is all but camouflaged by its clever staging, flavourful dialogue, and poetic images. While the story involves the plight of a handsome young man in pursuit of a beautiful maiden, there are several subplots underscoring the main action which result in an ap-

peeling level of complexity. The structure of the script is refreshingly unconventional though the use of a stage manager for scene changes in a bit passé.

In the early stages of the play, the audience is led through a series of expository scenes which introduce the key characters. Cook's stylization of his characters in one of the most interesting and challenging aspects of this script for young audiences. One learns that impoverished fisherman Joe has single-handedly raised his beautiful daughter, Colleen, but knows that the time has come when "she too will be gone like the swallow, and that is right." Colleen, a heroine of delightful common sense and youthful wisdom, asserts that the time is not yet ripe for her departure:

There will be time for the young men,
and the holding in arms, and the long nights of love.
But when again will there be time to sing in the water?

One discovers that the merchant, Black Fred, is not as fearsome as his name implies but that, in actual fact, he is bullied by his wife. The most outrageous character is the merchant's wife who complains of her husband's conduct while she's "down in Florida working (her) butt off to get a tan."

With this colourful array of characters, the plot takes off and follows a likely scenario: the fisherman falls victim to the schemes of the merchant's wife and finds himself in a predicament only to be rescued by the friend who ultimately wins the hand of Colleen in the process.

This play offers far more than a predictable plot. Its characters are grotesquely comical but are not without a margin of sensibility and the language ranges from enchantingly colloquial ("he can spin tales with sleeves on them") to lyrically poetic.

What is most striking about the play is its dramatic versatility. Within a simple framework, there are scenes involving slow motion movement, chorus chants, masked actors, music, songs, mime, shadow-boxing, audience participation, and an "intermission" which echoes the classical Greek chorus. The play is rich in its Newfoundland flavour, yet universal in its applications. While Act II is static in terms of setting and less sophisticated in its poetic language and subtlety of character, the play as a whole is a superior piece.

A very different style of theatre, *Love and work enough* is a collective creation conceived and edited by Peggy Sample. The title captures the essence of this lively romp which explores life in early Canada from the standpoint of the women who "made it our home." One of the most desirable attributes of this script is that it explores women's role in the bush from a lighthearted, tongue in cheek, non-defensive position.

The play has fifteen scenes, with themes relating to adaptation in the new world and reflecting humourously on a phenomenon peculiar to the day. The authors say that the play might be performed with as few as four but a close examination of the script suggests that a larger cast would certainly aid in

some of the abrupt transitions, as well as in the measure of dramatic impact to be achieved in the dance sequences, choral chants, and company songs.

The characters are more interesting as symbolic archetypes than as individuals. In the early scenes, the audience is introduced to a midwife, a young Irish woman and a young Scottish woman. Each of them makes sporadic appearances during the drama, but none is developed as a well rounded character. Perhaps the most interesting characters in the script are those who have historical significance – such as Susanna Moodie whose perceptions of life in a hard, new land are explored with some measure of sensitivity.

While the play is basically didactic in nature and doesn't solicit any deep kind of emotional response from the audience in its early stages, it does break away from this mode in Scene fourteen when it takes its first serious turn in addressing the harsh realities of child bearing in a primitive setting. The audience is introduced to the "Crawley Family Documents" which simply announce the birth and death dates of the children and we learn that six out of eleven children die before the first year of life.

The final scene of the play, "The Accomplishment Reel", picks up the pace and once again lightens the mood of the play. The audience is left with a feeling of optimism toward the future, and an overwhelming sense of the importance of the role of women in society, both as pioneers and as an intricate part of modern society.

Betty Thompson's *The bittersweet kid* tells the story of a 12-year-old girl, Shannon Wise, who is diagnosed as having diabetes; the play focuses on her period of adjustment in coming to terms with her illness. The other characters in the play are Josie, Shannon's best friend, and Bill Wise, Shannon's father.

Shannon must report to Children's hospital. She begins to deny her disease, even going so far as throwing away her insulin and needles. The climax occurs when Shannon decides to join Josie for Hallowe'en trick or treating, but because she has not been taking her insulin, she collapses and Dad rushes her to the hospital. Ten days later, Shannon, back from the hospital, takes her insulin without prompting, taking responsibility for herself.

In scenario form, the action of the plot is, for the most part, viable. However, the script is weaker in character development and dialogue. While Shannon is unquestionably denying her condition, it would have been nice to see a bit more ambiguity leading into and perhaps descending from her peaked state of denial. The best friend is an ideal vehicle for disclosing some of Shannon's inner thoughts and yet conversations between the two never go beyond the superficial level. Likewise, while the father is trying to put up an heroic front with his daughter by disguising his desperation for money and kidding with her while cooking her diabetic meals, he seems to lack the spine of a genuinely concerned parent. To suggest in the end that he has no control over whether or not his daughter takes her insulin (i.e., potentially lives or dies) seems a bit flimsy and unrealistic. The dialogue also sounds too contrived at

times; the 12-year-olds are not given enough credit for their ability to function beyond a superficial level. Yes, Shannon does come to a revelation in the end and accepts responsibility for herself, but it would have been more interesting to explore her inner feelings, rather than simply witness the external behaviour which leads to her change.

As a result, the play seems to be overtly moralistic and never fully achieves the emotional impact that the subject warrants. It is, however, a useful tool for introducing the concept of disease and acceptance, but the true learning would come in additional research and effective reflection on the characters' complex network of behavioral motivations.

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CANADA THEN, CANADA NOW

Barnardo kids. Janice Wiseman. Words and music, James Gordon. Copy-script. Distributed by Playwrights Union of Canada. 23 pp., \$5.00. [First produced: Grande Theatre Project, Ontario, 1985]; **Not so dumb.** John Lazarus. Copyscript. Distributed by Playwrights Union of Canada. 43 pp., \$5.00. [First produced: Green Thumb Theatre for Young People, B.C., 1984]; **Night light.** John Lazarus. Copyscript. Distributed by Playwrights Union of Canada. 39 pp., \$5.00. [First produced: Green Thumb Theatre for Young People, B.C., 1987].

Barnardo kids is a fascinating blend of Canadian and British history with music and drama that results in a delightful sincere look at vignettes of life in early Canada.

A small cast plays multiple roles on a sparse stage tracing the background of orphaned children abandoned in 19th century England, as they become indentured servants in Canada in their attempts to make a new life.

The title comes from Doctor Barnardo, an English medical doctor-cum-preacher who has taken pity on the street arabs of his city. Or has he? The audience is teased and left wondering about Doctor Barnardo's intentions until the end of the play. Mature audiences may be able to parallel evangelists of today with the doctor, a situation which may result in even more thoughtful discussion after the play.

The story begins with voices on a playground, spitefully referring to Eliza-