Two
Breaking Away and Moving On, 1989–1993

Resisting and embracing the feminist label
Artists, particularly those working in the avant-garde, seldom like having their work defined for them, and they are reluctant to be pigeonholed in the media. This is not just a Canadian perception: the British playwright Bryony Lavery remembers how her initial reluctance to define herself as a feminist gave way once she actually began working with and appreciating feminist theatre companies (in her case, Monstrous Regiment and the Women’s Theatre Group). Her experience of working in a feminist theatre environment led her to embrace the feminist label with pride.  

In the Canadian context, the magazine Broadside (vol. 4 no. 5) ran an article in November of 1983 entitled “No Mean Feet,” by Amanda Hale (who would later have a play produced by Nightwood and go on to work at the Company of Sirens with Cynthia Grant). Hale’s article begins by describing an abbreviated version of Rina Fraticelli’s report on the status of women in Canadian theatre that had been published in the September 1982 issue of FUSE magazine. Hale announces that in response to the report, a group of about forty-five women had recently formed a Women in Theatre group in Toronto and were meeting on a monthly basis. Two of these women, Susan Padveen and Kate Lushington, had taken a further step by forming a company called Mean Feet, the aims of which were: to give visibility to the problems women
encounter as a result of gender stereotyping; to create opportunities for female directors and playwrights; and to develop the skills required to capitalize on those opportunities. Lushington is said to have felt isolated as a female director, and Mean Feet was an attempt to create a community of women.²

Because Broadside is a feminist publication, Hale is careful to specify the kind of feminism that Mean Feet represents: “Both Lushington and Padveen are feminists of the liberal, broad spectrum variety rather than the separatist perspective, and they intend to reflect this in their work by giving visibility to the feminist perspective.” Both felt that male artistic directors were not willing to take a chance on women directors, and that an individual woman’s success or failure unfairly reflected on all other women directors. But at the same time, they were concerned that they would contribute to their own “ghettoization” if they dealt only with women’s issues or were seen to be producing “agitprop.” Hale explains, “Lushington and Padveen feel they must compete on the open market rather than retreating into ‘women only’ theatre justified by the all-too-true excuse of discrimination.” This is an interesting statement, considering that Kate Lushington took over as Nightwood’s artistic director in 1988 and, if anything, moved the “women-only” company in a more explicitly feminist direction. During Lushington’s tenure at Nightwood (1988–1993), its mandate statements, publicity materials, and choices of shows tended to emphasize politics as much as, or even more than, artistic concerns.

Lushington’s comments in the 1983 article express an ambivalence with the feminist label and the threat of ghettoization that are echoed in Cynthia Grant’s comments about the founding of Nightwood: “Personally, I wished to have a career as a director, not as a woman director. Although I was already clearly defined as a feminist, I knew the derogatory, second-class implications of such terms.”³ Although theatre practitioners like Grant and Lushington readily defined themselves and their politics as feminist, they went through an initial period when they resisted having their work labelled as such.
The times were changing in the early 1980s, though, and with the release of Fraticelli’s report and the growing strength of feminism, women began to understand their marginalized position in the theatre as part of a much larger problem, and came to embrace the movement that was identifying and critiquing that condition. In an interview in 1996, Lushington acknowledges the gap that had existed earlier between her personal feminist politics and her discomfort with being labelled as a “woman director.” The disjunction was so extreme that she even refused to be interviewed by Fraticelli for her report. When the report came out, however, Lushington remembers “being totally bowled over by her conclusions and being able to relate to every single one of them.” Lushington came to embrace the idea of Nightwood as a kind of “sheltered workshop” where women could hone their skills, talk, and pursue common interests; “where you wouldn’t have to explain yourself every second word for somebody who didn’t know what you were talking about … Nightwood is trying to be a safe place for people to write about things that are dangerous as well as scary.”

While still conscious that their careers have been categorized in a way that a man’s might not have been, women like Grant and Lushington accepted the label and attempted to make feminism fit their own individual work, as opposed to making the work fit feminism. Both, for example, have done solo performance art pieces that tackle social issues that are not exclusively feminist, yet this work is clearly situated within their own personal understandings of political and aesthetic practice. As feminism has evolved, it has expanded to include more women, who have, in turn, shaped feminism by expanding what are considered “feminist” issues. For example, like Grant, Lushington was involved with Women’s Cultural Building, and it was there that she met Johanna Householder, a member of The Clichettes. In 1987, Lushington wrote a “Groundswell” show about housing issues for the performance-art trio; Up Against The Wallpaper was then picked up for a full production by Nightwood at the Factory Theatre in January of 1988, directed by Maureen White. Later that spring, Lushington was hired as Nightwood’s new artistic coordinator.
1988: A new era — Kate Lushington

In a 1988 application for a Grant in Aid of the Arts to the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto Cultural Affairs Division, Nightwood defined itself as “a feminist collectively-run professional theatre company, dedicated to the development of new Canadian work and to supporting the work of women writers and directors.” But a real break with the past would come that year, when Kate Lushington was hired as artistic coordinator, replacing Maureen White, and none of the founding members were involved any longer at the organizational level. It was an inevitable progression, as each of the founding four was involved in outside endeavours, but it was also a tricky thing to negotiate: would a new artistic leader maintain the founders’ original vision, or choose to distance herself and start fresh? For her first season, Lushington inherited what Maureen White had already programmed, and was charged with organizing a national tour of Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet), a surprise hit from the year before. But when she began her own programming, Lushington ushered in a new and more politicized era at Nightwood by working with Diane Roberts, as her artistic associate, to enlarge the company’s mandate to include anti-racism work and to become more inclusive of women of colour.

When Lushington was hired in 1988, she was initially called “artistic coordinator,” but in 1990 the title was changed to “artistic director,” and it has remained so ever since. The title and its adjustment reflected an ongoing struggle to balance different agendas that were not well served by collectivity: the desire to be taken seriously within the theatre community, which demands artistic leadership; the desire to retain the support of the feminist community, which prefers alternative approaches to organization but also wants strong work; and the desire for a clear relationship between the board and the staff. Lushington was hired as artistic coordinator with the idea that, as with Vingoe’s and White’s terms, the position would rotate again within two years, but instead she felt encouraged to stay on and follow through with the changes she had begun.5

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Nightwood’s board of directors also changed its structure and purpose that year. At first it had been an artist-run board, emulating the Theatre Centre model; under Lushington there was more of an emphasis on attracting women with certain skills, such as legal expertise and fundraising experience, and the board was referred to as “community-based.” The artistic decisions were taken over by the Play Group, a collective of artists working in conjunction with the board and staff. At a meeting of an ad hoc Structure Committee in November of 1988, it was decided that the board should encompass a balance of community and artist members. The artistic coordinator and general manager were to be informed of all meetings and could attend with “a voice but no vote.” The Play Group was to include the artistic coordinator and one or two board members, plus four to six artists appointed by the board.

In a July 1989 application to the Ministry of Culture and Communications for money to hold a board retreat, Lushington clarifies:

Since I joined Nightwood last September as the first Artistic Coordinator from outside the group of founding members, the Board has been under-going a year of structural transition, from an open ended collective approach to a more traditional structure, with the establishment of standing committees to handle tasks, intensive Board recruitment, and the setting up of terms for Board Members.

Nightwood’s mission statement had also been rewritten as follows: “To provide opportunities for all women to create and explore new visions of the world, stretching the concept of what is theatrical, and to hone their skills as artists, so that more of us may see our reality reflected on this country’s stages, thus offering theatre goers the full diversity of the Canadian experience.” The term “collectively run” is noticeably absent, and instead, the word “diversity” takes on a new prominence.
Nightwood was consciously abandoning the collective administrative structure for a more traditional model. The whole concept of collectivity is about sharing responsibility and power, but among feminist artists, there was a growing dissatisfaction with collectivity as a philosophy. When Kate Lushington eventually left the position of artistic director in the fall of 1993, the enormous search committee was made up of Banuta Rubess, Sally Han, Jennifer Ross, Ann-Marie MacDonald, Kate Tucker, Monique Mojica, ahdri zhina mandiela, Amanda Mills, Astrid Janson, and Diane Roberts, as well as the rest of the board. A revealing note from the minutes of their 30 August meeting mentions that Rubess had turned down the position of artistic coordinator back in 1988, when Lushington was hired, because she felt her need for personal artistic expression would not be encouraged or desirable in a collective structure. Apparently, this concern had been echoed in similar terms by several other potential candidates: they feared their own need for personal artistic growth would be incompatible with a collective administration. Lushington alleviated the problem by actively distancing the company from its collective past.

By the fall of 1989, in the first issue of a brand-new Nightwood newsletter called Nightwords, Lushington explicitly charted what she saw as the company’s new identity in a column entitled “A Word, or two, from the Artistic Coordinator.” The 1989/90 season was celebrated as Nightwood’s tenth anniversary, and in her column Lushington recounts Nightwood’s origins with The True Story of Ida Johnson and expresses the opinion that Nightwood had grown beyond the wildest dreams of its founders: “No longer a collective, the collaborative spirit lives on in the artistic heart of the company, The Play Group, consisting of Martha Burns, Jennie Dean, Pat Idlette, Astrid Janson, Kate Lushington and Djanet Sears.” With this statement, Lushington redefined the way Nightwood would present itself. There would be a stronger focus on administration, on having adequate office staff and large enough budgets to mount higher-profile shows. The board was increasingly made up of professional women, including lawyers,
accountants, and executives, and there were more fundraising events. The “collaborative spirit” shifted to the collective Play Group, who formed the selection committee for “Groundswell” and planned each season. Instead of sponsoring co-productions with collectives, such as The Anna Project or The Humbert Humbert Project, Nightwood supported its own playwright-in-residence; for the 1989/90 season, Sally Clark worked on her play Life Without Instruction.9

While in 1982, Lushington had been quoted by Amanda Hale as saying she was uncomfortable with “women-only” theatre, once she took over Nightwood, she started seeing the value of, and advocating for, that unique environment. As early as 1985, in her article “Fear of Feminism,” Lushington makes the analogy that both Canadian theatre and feminist theatre need the same encouragement and protection. Why, she asks, are people so terrified when women claim their true voice and equal participation in culture as women? Lushington challenges, “Feminism is not just a matter of doing non-sexist plays or replacing the boys at the top by girls. Feminism, rather, is a search, a constant questioning of accepted beliefs and hidden assumptions. It’s not a state, not an imperative, but a process, a dynamic.”10 As valuable as it may be to have more plays written and directed by women within mainstream theatre structures, the ongoing project of feminism and feminist theatre is far more wide-ranging and complex, and part of this larger project can only be carried out within the space of a women’s theatre company such as Nightwood.

Going further in her 1989 article “The Changing Body of Women’s Work,” Lushington provocatively claims, “All women theatre practitioners are by their very nature marginalized, disenfranchised, from prestigious 1988 Toronto Arts Award Winner Judith Thompson, to the community theatre workers from coast to coast who labour to give voice to the silenced.”11 Lushington cites statistics released by the Playwrights Union of Canada in 1988 showing that, of all new plays produced in the 1987/88 season, only seventeen percent were by women; even fewer were directed by women, and there were also few roles for women
actors. (These statistics were collected as a follow-up, six years later, to Rina Fraticelli’s original survey). Yet in the same article, Lushington quotes Janet Amos, who, during her 1985 term as artistic director of Theatre New Brunswick, fretted, “The danger (in labelling women’s work feminist) is that the work will either be rejected as propaganda, or worse, it will become more important that the work be done by women, than whether or not it is any good.”

Lushington criticizes Amos for her timidity, using the Playwrights Union numbers to note sarcastically, “Don’t worry, Ms Amos, we are in no imminent danger of affirmative action.”

Many of the problematic issues around feminist theatre are illustrated by Lushington’s article and her examples. While activists like Lushington are incensed by the statistical under-representation of women in theatre employment, which is at least partly a sociological and economic issue of employment equity, an artistic director like Amos is concerned with more ambiguous issues, like audience reception and “artistic quality.” While Lushington might advocate the tactical use of the word “feminist” to highlight the marginalized status of women’s work in a male-dominated field, Amos fears the word will evoke connotations and assumptions that will overshadow the work itself. The two women share certain concerns, both economic and aesthetic, but the word “feminist” inhabits diametrically opposed degrees of importance and has very different implications for their respective understandings of theatre.

1990: Looking back on a decade; repositioning

The ideal of Nightwood as an independent, woman-centred company was presented to the media as a better alternative than trying to fit women’s work into male-dominated theatres. In a 1990 article in the Toronto Star newspaper, Kate Lushington asserts, “Finally, we don’t have to change something because somebody else tells us to. We want power—not huge power—but just enough power to be able to put on a play the way we want to. That’s what Nightwood is all about.”

While Lushington’s comment is not meant to be separatist, the clear implication is that women must
have the space and the means to create from an independent vision. Sometimes this has been fulfilled through the very existence of Nightwood as a women’s theatre company, and sometimes it has been explicitly expressed in the creation and content of a particular play, such as *Smoke Damage*.

In the spring of 1990, *Fuse* magazine published the article “10 Years and 5 Minutes: Nightwood Celebrates a Decade of Feminist Theatre,” by Susan G. Cole, a member of the Nightwood board. In direct contrast to the 1987 article by Meredith Levine, Cole starts off by saying that Nightwood has been substantially transformed from its original concept and is grappling with fundamental questions: How does a theatre company remain true to its alternative roots while fulfilling a political mandate of reaching out to a large audience? How does it function within a theatre community unfamiliar with, and sometimes hostile to, feminist principles? How does any theatre survive in the 1990s? Like Levine, Cole believes that Cynthia Grant’s resignation represented a shift in Nightwood’s direction, but rather than seeing Nightwood’s move toward the mainstream as a natural emergence of latent tendencies, Cole problematizes the move and characterizes it as part of an ongoing struggle for definition. New audiences and the involvement of an increasing number of artists demanded a reevaluation of the company’s ability to fulfill all the requirements of a feminist mandate and remain accountable to the community: “The structure, which worked well for a small group, couldn’t be expected to function for Nightwood’s slowly changing political priorities. In 1985, Nightwood established a board of directors, employed a general manager as its first paid staff and hired Mary Vingoe as its first artistic coordinator.”

While Cole is correct in depicting a growing move toward structure within Nightwood, her dates are in dispute: by 1982, Nightwood had a first board in place and Cynthia Grant was consistently referred to as artistic director, at least in the press; in fact, Levine goes so far as to refer to Grant as “Nightwood’s founding Artistic Director.” Cole writes that the founders agonized over every move, making sure that there were artists on the
board and naming an artistic coordinator instead of a director in order to “institutionalize the collective values they thought might be leached out of the company under the aegis of a board.” But this concern for artist representation on the board and the coordinator title really came about during the terms of Mary Vingoe and Maureen White, between 1986 and 1988, after Grant had left. Cole believes that if these women had been labelled artistic directors (as Grant was) they might have been considered more legitimate by their counterparts at other theatres and by government funding bodies. This is difficult to judge, but it is noteworthy that Kate Lushington made a conscious switch to the title artistic director.

The most interesting aspect of Cole’s article is her discussion of the “Five Minute Feminist Cabaret.” Cole declares, “In many ways, FemCab has become emblematic of Nightwood’s internal philosophical tensions. Originated by Women’s Cultural Building in 1983, it started out as a quintessentially grassroots event, with an open call to anyone female with a feminist bent to submit ideas.” For the first two years there were no auditions and bars were the venues, but when Nightwood took over as producer of the event, it was mounted in legitimate theatre settings. According to Cole, “FemCab supporters, proud of the roots of the event, challenged this turn of events. They believed that it would work against Nightwood’s philosophy of encouraging new theatre artists.” While Cole leaves her discussion at that, she is correct in identifying “FemCab” as a source of potential philosophical conflict over the issue of inclusion versus professionalism. In fact, when a new leadership team took over from Kate Lushington, they suspended the annual event for two years before resurrecting it in 1996—at least in part to create a period of distance between themselves and the past.

Cole concludes her article with the telling statement, “Many theatre artists call it a support group, but they couldn’t really tell you all the women that are in it. But in spite of the elasticity of its definition and the fact that the company has never had a permanent theatre space, many women playwrights, directors
and actors call Nightwood home.” Nightwood is loosely defined in this regard; very much a theatre of people, and yet an influence and force for many who may barely be acquainted, despite the mutual benefit of their community bond.

1988–1990: Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)

Ann-Marie MacDonald’s Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet) is one of the most successful plays in English-Canadian theatre history, and it is no exaggeration to say that its surprise breakthrough changed the course of Nightwood’s history. First produced by Nightwood in 1988, directed by Banuta Rubess, it was remounted in 1990 and won the Governor General’s Literary Award and a Chalmers Canadian Play Award for Best Production. It continues to be produced frequently in Canada, the U.S., and England, often at colleges and universities, where it is also part of many academic curricula. Kathleen Gallagher has written about Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet) as a text to use when working with female students, and cites the play’s treatment of sexual identity and gender construction as factors that make it useful in sociological terms. Considering the frequency with which this play is produced in school environments, it is significant that a good part of its popularity comes from its particular brand of feminism. Despite the fact that the play dates from the late 1980s, its feminism can be recognized as fitting into the Third Wave model in its irreverence and insistence on pleasure.

Ann-Marie MacDonald’s play breaches all boundaries—between texts, historical periods, nations, genders and sexualities, and certainly theatrical conventions such as language and spectacle. The critical assessment of the play has focused on its post-colonial content (Wilson 1992), its treatment of Shakespeare’s female characters (Porter 1995), its sociological uses in teaching (Gallagher 2002), and its use of a recognizably feminist mode of comedy (Hengen 1995). The play has also been criticized (by, for example, Ric Knowles and Marianne Novy) as an affirmation
of the privileged cultural position and “high culture” theatrical tradition of Shakespeare. This very affirmation is what situates the play as Third Wave and post-modern: the breaching of boundaries between “high” and “low” culture, and the simultaneous embrace and critique of its source material.

The main character, Constance Ledbelly, is an exploited junior academic who is working on the thesis that Shakespeare used a source by some unknown author to create the plays Romeo and Juliet and Othello, but suppressed the comic Fool character in order to turn them into tragedies. Shakespeare then gave his source book to his friend Gustav the Alchemist to preserve in an undecipherable code. Constance is trying to decode the Gustav manuscript in order to determine the original author. After a first act in which we come to understand both Constance’s quest and her dreary life circumstances, she is magically transported into the worlds of Othello and Romeo and Juliet and succeeds in turning them back into comedies through her intervention in the fate of the characters.

Although Constance is a university professor, her low status and poor self-esteem mean that she inhabits a “youthful” subject position that students can relate to more easily. As Laurin Porter points out, “For all practical purposes, as the play begins Constance is a child, an innocent.” Her desk is covered with remnants from her childhood, and during the course of the play she recounts incidents from her experiences in grade five (when she was tormented by bullying girls) and grade eight (an erotic encounter with her classmate Ginnie Radclyffe). The play can be seen to chart Constance’s journey through her own unconscious mind, the process by which she explores the different sides of her personality and sexuality and finally emerges a whole, adult woman. This is a journey especially relevant to young feminists and to students in general. As Shannon Hengen observes, it is of central importance to the play’s comedy and its revolutionary potential that the audience empathizes with a marginalized protagonist.

The aspect that most clearly signals a Third Wave attitude in the play is the treatment of gender and sexuality. In her study of
contemporary young women’s sexual behaviour, Paula Kamen claims that, “using their own taste as their barometer, they have a broad menu of choices at their fingertips” and that “the greatest sexual revolution has taken place inside women’s heads.” In Act Three, when Constance arrives in the Verona of Romeo and Juliet, she has lost her tweed skirt and appears only in a jacket, long underwear, and boots. Thus clad as a man, she is understood to be male by all who meet her. Both Romeo and Juliet desire Constance as a boy. Romeo believes the boy, “Constantine,” to be heterosexual, so dresses as a girl to win “him.” Sexuality is cued entirely by clothing, something one can easily put on and take off. All Constance has to do to “be” male is to lose her skirt, and all Romeo has to do to “be” a female love interest is to gain a skirt. Juliet believes the boy, “Constantine,” to be homosexual, and so dresses as another boy to win “him.” When, in her bedchamber, Juliet discovers that Constance is, in fact, biologically a woman, and a much older woman at that, her desire is again swiftly accommodated:

**Constance:** I’ll have to trust you with the truth. / My name is Constance. I’m a woman.

**Juliet:** Oh

**Constance:** That’s right. So that’s that.

**Juliet:** And art thou of Cyprus?

**Constance:** Not originally.

**Juliet:** Then art thou of Lesbos?!

**Constance:** What?! I’ve never been there in my life.

**Juliet:** O most forbidden love of all!

**Constance:** Oh no.

**Juliet:** Unsanctified desire, more tragic far/than any star-crossed love ‘twixt boy and girl!

**Constance:** Now wait.

**Juliet:** Once more I am a virgin maid. / O take me to thine island’s curv’ed shore, and lay me on the bosom of the sand.
The characters do acknowledge societal strictures and gender expectations: at least partly, Constance is thinking of personal safety when she goes along with the mistaken perception that she is male, and part of Juliet’s desire for Constance as a woman lies in the “forbidden” nature of that love. But as Laurin Porter observes, “While these scenes are played tongue-in-cheek, Mac-Donald uses Juliet in a more serious fashion to awaken Constance to her own sexuality.”

Romeo, too, desires indiscriminately, male and female, with sweet abandon: first he pursues Juliet and Con-stantine, then Desdemona when she also arrives in Verona, and at the end he is carried offstage by Tybalt.

In MacDonald’s play, fluidity of sexual practice is not matched by an insistence on essential identity. As Sophia Phoca explains, “Queer politics challenges the essentialist assumption that ‘the queer’ emerges from a uniquely gay sexuality. Queer sexuality expresses a desire for polymorphous sexual configurations and fantasies which do not stem from a need to regulate, control and organize the sexual subject according to compulsory identifica-tion.”

All the characters are free to sexually pursue each other, but no one is required to claim a label, and no one is punished for what they want. The fluidity of sexual choice, the celebration of desire of many kinds, and most importantly, the lack of angst around the subject, all mark the play as Third Wave. Theorists such as Laurin Porter point out that the cross-dressing “allows MacDonald to reveal the extent to which not only our social exchanges but our very identities are shaped by gender constructs.”

The real subversion lies in the flagrant and gleeful manner in which these constructs are flouted and disre-garded. As Ann Wilson has argued, “The text is a sort of Arden ... where, free from the demands of the actual world, we can live imaginatively,” placing us in the role-playing, polymorphous playroom of the Third Wave. To once again quote Phoca (a theorist who uses the term post-feminism as interchangeable with Third Wave), this movement is about “retaining a desire for empowerment without telling women how to experience their sexuality. By celebrating difference, post-feminism invites women
to explore the complexities inscribed in the construction of the sexual subject.”

As Ann Brooks observes, “the truly resistant female body is not the body that wages war against feminine sexualisation and objectification, but the body … that uses simulation strategically in ways that challenge the stable notion of gender as the edifice of sexual difference.” The Third Wave embrace of pluralism can be highlighted by challenging assumptions and clichés about race, as well, especially through casting choices. In a 2001 production of *Goodnight Desdemona* in Toronto, for example, Desdemona was played by a Black actor, Alison Sealy-Smith — challenging traditional Shakespearean production conventions, opening up further layers of possibility for political identification and new resonance in the text, and playing with the supposed transgressiveness of interracial eroticism. Such casting choices further align the play with Third Wave feminism through live production.

This liberating effect is truly obvious only in performance. Martha Tuck Rozett, for example, misses the subversiveness of the action set in Verona when she writes that, after the wedding banquet scene early in Act Three, “The play degenerates into silliness and confusion … and though it would be tempting to see this as MacDonald’s comment on the improbable complications and mistaken identities of *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet*, parody for its own sake threatens to overwhelm the play’s feminist agenda.” Rozett claims that MacDonald only “regains control of the action at the very end,” in a “long scolding oration to both Juliet and Desdemona” in which she teaches them to eschew their predispositions toward violence and suicide. Later in her critique, Rozett wonders how Juliet and Desdemona can possibly return to their respective husbands after what they have experienced, and notes that Romeo and Othello do not appear in this final interaction with Constance, which she takes to be the moment when the two female characters learn their lessons. But Rozett disregards the fact that the actor who plays Othello in Act Two also plays Juliet’s Nurse in Act Three, and that Romeo has been wearing a dress since the wedding banquet. The visual effect of
these two characters in drag is thoroughly redemptive, at least for the spectator at the live performance. If Juliet and Desdemona have changed, so have their mates. Furthermore, we do see the two men again: after the scene in which Constance “scolds” the two women, the play concludes with an epilogue in which the entire company enters dancing, clearly suggesting unity and acceptance as in any traditional comic structure.

Production choices can sway audience perceptions, and it would be possible for a director to downplay some of the play’s subversive effect. Ric Knowles, for example, describes the play’s “representation of polymorphous sexuality and lesbian eroticism” as “muted.” But this depends on choices of casting, costuming, and direction. And for many mainstream heterosexual spectators, especially those outside of urban centres, who may not see much theatre, the very fact that they have found themselves empathizing with and enjoying characters who display homosexual behaviour is in itself a significant response.

Not all audience members will respond in the same way, of course, or necessarily in a positive way. As Natalie Fenton explains, audiences “use and interpret … according to their own social, cultural and individual circumstances—the audience is involved in making sense of the images they see—the message does not have the total monopoly on the meaning.” The play’s popular success, however, does suggest that it has widespread appeal. Of particular interest is its appeal for young women. The oft-repeated criticism of Third Wave feminism—that it is largely media-obsessed—discounts the critical importance of representation to self-definition and identity for young women and men. Heywood and Drake paint a picture of today’s academics “facing classrooms of young women and men who are trained by the media caricature of ‘feminazis,’ who see feminism as an enemy or say ‘feminist’ things prefaced by ‘I’m not a feminist, but’…” Kaschak also identifies the phenomenon of negative media portrayal as a significant obstacle to young women claiming a feminist identity: “Specifically they face the dilemma of reconciling two different cultural discourses, that of the classroom which

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tends to credit feminism for many cultural strides and that of the popular media, which portrays feminists negatively.\textsuperscript{35} As a result, Kaschak advises that educators may have to take into account initial negative responses to feminism in younger women.\textsuperscript{36} Much of the appeal of \textit{Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)} as a teaching tool, then, is its ability to frame feminism in a way that students can appreciate.

The very silliness and confusion that Rozett condemns produces a carnivalesque fantasy of permission. The play demonstrates, rather than lectures about, an agency free from gender assignment for all its characters. Citing Kathleen Rowe and Mary Russo, Fiona Carson has argued that the ribald excess of the unruly woman in comedy can be used affirmatively to destabilize and provoke social transformation. Perhaps critics like Rozett are overlooking this crucial aspect of theatre, which can make feminist meaning in performance as much as through written lines. Indeed, Rozett seems relieved when Constance finally has a speech with a concrete, recognizable message, although the message (to live by questions and confusion rather than answers and certainty), is redundant at that point. In fact, the Third Wave feminist spectator might not be convinced that Desdemona’s violence is such a negative quality, if by “violent” one reads physically strong and capable of action: consider the many female heroines in popular culture who exist in similar realms of fantasy and display just these attributes. And the audience has already seen demonstrated the childishness of committing suicide over lost love, as Juliet readily recovers from heartbreak to find one new love after another. In comedy, perhaps in any theatrical performance, the audience does not necessarily have to be told a character’s behaviour is folly, or liberating, because we can see it for ourselves. Again, the fact that \textit{Goodnight Desdemona} models a forgiving world means that its “silliness and confusion” are part and parcel of its Third Wave feminism.

The second aspect that makes the play Third Wave is its postmodernism; specifically, its simultaneous embrace and critique of both high and low culture. \textit{Goodnight Desdemona} employs two
texts in which traditional power relations result in death for the tragic heroines, Desdemona and Juliet, and shows how the internal contradictions of those texts produce an undermining protest in the viewer (we feel, for example, how preventable and unfair Desdemona’s and Juliet’s deaths are). As a reading of canonical literature, *Goodnight Desdemona* foregrounds the act of feminist resistant reading—its plotline is explicitly based on a female academic choosing to re-investigate the authority of its source texts—and as Ric Knowles points out, the audience finds its interpretive role inscribed as a resisting one. Djanet Sears would later use a similar strategy in her play *Harlem Duet*, even using one of the same Shakespearean plays, *Othello*, to simultaneously appeal to and undercut the audience’s investment in the canon. As theatre, *Goodnight Desdemona* uses theatrical tradition and conventions to produce its comic effect and make its feminist meaning, through the familiar devices of cross-dressing, mistaken identity, and even vaudevillian humour. And as Canadian theatre, it parodies its colonial relationship with its source material. MacDonald’s play alternates between different time frames and different fictional worlds, and uses ambiguity and indeterminacy to develop not only the play’s comedy, but also its clever subversion of audience expectation.

*Goodnight Desdemona* uses plays by Shakespeare as inspiration and source material for its plot and language (primarily *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet*, but with references to others, most notably *Hamlet*). The play cleverly works with the concept of authority by having Constance, an exploited female Canadian academic with no personal “authority,” searching for the source material of the most highly respected male literary authority (Shakespeare) and discovering that she herself is that Author. This draws attention, of course, to the play as a work created by an author, Ann-Marie MacDonald. Familiar characters and lines from Shakespeare are appropriated into a new text, which makes for a highly satisfying experience for the audience, as they can recognize the source material and take pleasure in its witty reinterpretation—they are able to admire both authors simultaneously. While the plotlines
of Shakespeare’s plays and the fates of his female characters are critiqued, the audience is never actually required to give up their affection and respect for Shakespeare—a complicity with dramatic tradition that is very post-modern, and an attitude toward problematic cultural artefacts that is very Third Wave.

*Goodnight Desdemona* takes the traditional versions of Desdemona’s and Juliet’s stories and reverses them. This is done for comic effect, but it also serves to point out, and effectively dismiss, the ideology underlying their traditional portrayal as passive victims. When MacDonald reconstructs them as powerful women capable of efficacious action, she not only creates delightful characters, but also empowering ones. In response to the question, “Is parody almost an inevitable part of the portrayal of women on the stage today?” MacDonald has responded:

> It’s like opening up a trunk that used to be full of instruments of torture and now everything has turned into toys.
> When you reclaim and transform ideas and methods that have been used against you as a woman, you become empowered. Subversion of this kind is healthy.38

The audience member (especially the contemporary feminist) is not satisfied with Desdemona’s and Juliet’s preventable deaths and objects to their function as sacrifices within male narratives, a dissatisfaction that MacDonald consciously remedies. By embracing a vision of female wholeness that encompasses an intriguing variety of desiring and desired characters, *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* is uniquely in tune with the kind of representation young feminists respond to. MacDonald’s technique clearly moves in the direction of embracing her cultural sources, yet uses them to empower her female characters, particularly sexually and particularly in the realm of “the revolution within,” to use the phrase coined by Gloria Steinem. MacDonald’s choices make the play appealing to viewers who are more comfortable with Third Wave feminism’s embrace of contradictions. The critics Linda Burnett, Ellen McKay, and Marianne Novy have all suggested that it is not
Shakespeare’s work that is patriarchal and imperialist, but the subsequent critical interpretations (whether literary criticism or productions) that have allowed only one possible reading. They argue that a parody like MacDonald’s actually restores a sense of what is already there, or at least what might be possible.39

Juliet’s seduction of Constance is set up in a way that makes it “acceptable to spectators often uncomfortable with same-sex wooing”40 and the play as a whole makes a good text for teaching students because “many will enjoy it while few if any complain about its subversive laughter.”41 MacDonald herself has stated that it is her “crusade” to bring the spectator to identify with a character she had previously thought of as “alien or deviant.”42 Certainly, in terms of Nightwood’s profile and mainstream success, Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet) was a huge breakthrough.

1990: Nightwood’s Evolving Mandate

Throughout her tenure, Kate Lushington addressed the definition of feminist theatre and Nightwood’s mandate in a number of articles. The topic is introduced in the Winter 1990 issue of the retitled newsletter, Night Talk, when Lushington discusses her experiences on tour with Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet). Because the presenter in Edmonton, Gyllian Raby, emphasized Nightwood’s position as a feminist theatre more than the other host companies had, Lushington spent her three days in Edmonton at talks, interviews, and meetings, trying to define Nightwood’s position. The experience resulted in a list of her conclusions: that feminist theatre challenges fixed ideas; it is woman-centred; it offers access to the means of production to women theatre artists; it is collaborative and non-hierarchical in process “yet unafraid to seize and wield power”; and it combats isolation, reaching out to other under-represented groups to promote alternative visions of the world. Lushington agrees that there are many other women and companies across Canada with different kinds and styles of feminist theatre, but with similar ideals and desires: “Nightwood does not represent all feminist theatre, and looks forward to trying on many different shoes in the future.”
In an article in the *Toronto Star* later that same year, Lushington elaborates further on the subject:

We don’t do issue-oriented theatre … It almost seems that if you’re talking about real issues then you can’t be theatrical and if you’re being theatrical then you’re talking in a kind of abstract way about art and can’t deal with real issues. We like to put the two together … Some people are saying Nightwood is going soft: “They used to do plays about violence against women (*This is For You, Anna*) and now they’re doing a play about a university lecturer who finds herself visiting the worlds of Shakespeare.” Those people want to plug us into their stereotype of what a feminist theatre company should do. But Nightwood is about exploding stereotypes. And that involves knocking conventional ways of thinking sideways a bit — our own as well as other peoples’.43

Lushington’s conception of feminism as being a matter of perception, rather than a series of specific political demands, is addressed in a 1991 article in *NOW*, in which she states:

It’s easy to mistake us for a social action theatre company because we have such a strong political bent, but we’re not just interested in social action … Everyone at Nightwood agrees that they want to affect change in society, but the nature of that change is an opening of the mind, a shifting of perception, a looking at things from different angles … Nightwood is given to exploding stereotypes, but one of those stereotypes is what a feminist theatre company is.44

In a way, these kinds of statements can be read as a response to Nightwood’s sudden, high-profile success. With the tremendous response to *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*, Nightwood was no longer quite as marginal and alternative as it used to be.
Perhaps paradoxically, with greater mainstream acceptance, the company had to reinforce its feminist principles. Nightwood did just that, by next taking on plays that addressed new communities and broke new ground—such as *A Fertile Imagination*, which Lushington directed in 1991.

### 1991: Semiotics and Sexuality — *A Fertile Imagination*

*A Fertile Imagination* is a great example of how Nightwood has nurtured new work within its network of programs, events, and opportunities for involvement. Susan G. Cole, an editor at the alternative weekly *NOW*, served on Nightwood’s board from 1986 to 1988. During that tenure, she performed an autobiographical monologue at “FemCab.” Her piece was further workshopped at the 1989 “Groundswell,” and Cole went on to develop it into a full-length play in collaboration with Kate Lushington and the cast. It opened in February 1991 at the Poor Alex Theatre, directed by Lushington and featuring Kate Lynch, Robin Craig, and Patricia Idlette, who was also a board member. A year later it was remounted at Theatre Passe Muraille, directed by Layne Coleman, with Yanna McIntosh replacing Idlette. Cole comments that when she first did the piece as a monologue, “It seemed to cross a lot of different sensibilities and communities. That’s what I remember most. It wasn’t one particular group of people who were touched by it.”

Nightwood is defined by this kind of example—by people who become involved in one capacity and move on to doing more. Kate Lynch had been in the cast of previous Nightwood productions, *The Herring Gull’s Egg* and *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*, and would return to participate in several “Groundswells” and to act in *Smudge* in 2000. Robin Craig would later appear in the 1993 “Groundswell” reading of *Charming and Rose: True Love*, also directed by Kate Lushington. *A Fertile Imagination* also illustrates Nightwood’s commitment to diversity and willingness to address lesbian issues, as it deals with two women having a baby together through artificial insemination. In the advance publicity for the show, Lushington revealed,
“Along the way, those involved in the production have been challenged in their heterosexist assumptions—something they hope will also happen with the audience.” In 2005, Nightwood embraced the topic of lesbian motherhood again with Diane Flacks’s autobiographical play *Bear With Me*, produced in association with Buddies in Bad Times, and directed by Kelly Thornton. To celebrate the premiere, Nightwood presented a panel discussion called “Ms.Conceptions: Queer Mothers and Children Tackle the Politics of Family,” moderated by the popular lesbian comedian Elvira Kurt.

*A Fertile Imagination* is a largely autobiographical account by Cole, a well-known Toronto journalist, chronicling a lesbian couple’s attempts to have a baby. The main characters, Del and Rita, are looking for a sperm donor so that Rita can be artificially inseminated, or, as they prefer to call it, “alternatively fertilized.” Between scene transitions, a recording of the fictional couple’s answering machine messages is played. The following example, from the transition between Act One, Scenes Two and Three, suggests the play’s humorous tone and its placement in a specific social milieu:

— Hi gals, this is Audra. I’m getting on with the legal paperwork. Your guy’s lawyer wants to come Tuesday at 5:30 pm. Make sure you’re home.

— Del, this is your editor. I have a question about your sexual harassment piece. You say that a male professor’s comment on a female student’s clothing might constitute harassment. Don’t you think it should read that it could constitute sexual harassment?

— Rita, dear. It’s mum. I wish you wouldn’t put on that machine. I’m taping the Donahue show for you. He’s interviewing some women who are, you know, in your situation.

— Hey Del. Dykes on Donahue. Turn it on.

The play is written in a situation comedy format, taking material that, for many in the audience, might be unfamiliar and possibly
threatening, and making it seem friendly and familiar. Lushington, as director, chose not to use blackouts between scenes, instead showing the characters continuing to live within their home environment in an attempt to really involve the audience in the onstage world. A series of short, fast-paced scenes introduce likeable, easily identifiable characters who find themselves in an unusual situation and deal with it in a light, comic manner. Helpful information about reproductive technologies is offered within a highly normalized portrait of lesbian life. (Interestingly, this is the same strategy employed by Ellen, an actual television sitcom of the same time period that dealt with lesbian life).

According to Lizbeth Goodman, the British writer Libby Mason’s play Double Vision, produced by Women’s Theatre Group in 1982, was described in the press as being “like a Woody Allen script for lesbians.” This is similar to the way A Fertile Imagination was marketed in Toronto, and also brings to mind some of the critical response to Wendy Wasserstein’s plays in America, where her serious intent was sometimes overlooked in favour of the work’s lighter, comic elements. Nightwood chose not to produce the play at Buddies in Bad Times, Toronto’s gay and lesbian theatre space, and advertised it as a “courageous comedy” in anticipation of some resistance to its content. The production was designed, at least in part, to attract a non-homosexual audience, and Cole’s choice to use the non-threatening sitcom format fit in with this agenda. In fact, Kate Lushington has commented that fathers often responded to the play in an unexpectedly positive manner, since they found they could relate to Del’s role and feelings as the non-pregnant parent.

However, Cole also had a socially transformative agenda for her play. In both the script and the program for the second production, there are a number of cues that the playwright is making every effort to place her play within a contemporary social and political, and specifically feminist, context. For example, the script calls for the third actor (who plays a variety of other characters) to be Black, in an attempt to reflect Toronto’s multicultural makeup. A sarcastic reference is made to the “politically fantastic element”
of having a “radical feminist” like Del write a regular column for a daily newspaper. Reference is made to the Morgentaler Clinic, Toronto’s free-standing abortion facility (predating the destruction of the clinic by arson in the following year, 1992), and program notes dedicate the play to the pro-choice movement and thank the Gay and Lesbian Community Appeal for seed money.

The match between form and content was an uneasy fit. The superficiality of the form tended to undermine the attempt to get audiences to do any real questioning of the multitude of issues being raised. Reviewers either concentrated on the comedy and ignored the politics, or argued that the form undermined the politics. On one end of the spectrum are reviews in which well-known American television sitcoms are cited as a way to sum up the play: Del is called “a gay Rhoda for the 90s,” and Del and Rita are described as being such warm characters that “even Archie Bunker might want to know them.” The critic Vit Wagner complained that the play “is such an odd mix of radical politics and sitcom convention that one is tempted to call [Cole] a lesbian Neil Simon. This is Barefoot in the Park for the same-sex crowd.” Wagner identifies the “odd couple” pairing of Del and Rita, and the “familiar, comfortable way the comedy works” through one-liners, as further evidence of its sitcom format.

At the other end of the spectrum, Sandra Haar, writing for a gay and lesbian newspaper and describing the play as having a “linear plotline” with “skit-like segments,” faults the comedic form for undermining the play’s politics. Haar comments that while “lesbians everywhere” were no doubt encouraged to see a “mainstream” company like Nightwood mounting this play, Cole was too obviously trying to appeal to a broad audience. As evidence, Haar points out that some jokes and references were “extended to permit a small explanation … Because lesbians live a different reality than non-lesbians, the extending [of jokes] served to pander to the needs of a mainstream audience.” The review makes it apparent that the sitcom formula was not necessarily an effective match for a more politicized spectator—one attracted to, rather than wary of, the play’s content.
Haar also comments that she did not find the actors’ portrayal of lesbians convincing, and as a result, she, as a lesbian audience member, could not relate to them or enjoy the play. Haar complains that the actors were too stiff with each other and that humour “consistently threatened the intensity of the most sexual of scenes. From the very beginning I was unable to identify with the characters’ sensibilities or connect with their presence.” At this point she reveals that neither of the actors is lesbian and that “the actors’ inability to reflect the particularity of the situation they were representing was masked by the steady flow of jokes.” One might interpret this as an instance where the actors took on a “disguise,” knowing that some of their audience would see through it because of prior or “specialized” knowledge, and hoped that their attempt would be artful enough to convince the viewers-in-the-know to suspend their disbelief. But Haar found fault with the production specifically because the two actors playing the couple were known to be heterosexual. She writes, “Of course, reality is not what theatre is about, but authenticity is. The relational, emotional framework that Cole has claimed to want to contextualize lesbian sexuality cannot support the sex and sensuality in A Fertile Imagination and little heat is generated.” This is interesting semiotically, as the actors, as signs, relate to the stage world of meaning, and are in turn intended to be read by spectators in relation to the real world. But for this reviewer, and perhaps for other audience members, the process broke down from the beginning, disrupting the relay of signification throughout. While gender and race are generally evident to the audience, perhaps sexual orientation requires another kind of perception. Jill Dolan, in Breaking the Code: Musings on Lesbian Sexuality and the Performer, argues that all production choices are inherently political because a person’s gender and race have cultural meanings that bear ideological weight: “A lesbian required to pass as heterosexual on the street or stage is placed in a Brechtian position of commenting on her role, editorializing on the trappings of her impersonation for those who can see” (Dolan’s italics).
For this reviewer, authenticity has to do with recognition, with the perceived comfort level of the actors, and with their “real-life” sexuality. In the politicized arena of gay theatre, the emphasis is not on a traditional approach to inhabiting a role, but on reading the performers as performers and as members of a particular community. The artist’s physical presence, her body, becomes the signifier of authenticity and the site of lived experience, and is just as important as the veracity of the playwright’s script. Particularly in work that positions itself as autobiographical, or that seeks to represent the experience of any marginalized community, the visible reality of the physical body is of enormous importance, much as it would be with the issue of race. While a non-lesbian actor cannot be excluded from playing a lesbian character, she must be prepared to withstand a different kind of scrutiny, both within the public discourse around the production and in the confines of the theatre space.

Concern with an authenticity that can be read on the body is directly related to the ongoing anxiety throughout the play with “natural” behaviour. For example, in one sequence, Del resents the fact that she and Rita have to involve a midwife to teach them the insemination procedure:

**Rita:** You know we can’t do this alone.
**Del:** But a fourth party? It’s bad enough we have to go sperm-hunting a third.
**Rita:** Del, we’ve been through this before. Why are you making it so complicated?
**Del:** Midwives don’t have to help other people get pregnant.
**Rita:** Since when do you care what other couples do?
**Del:** Well, the whole thing makes me feel...unnatural. I hate that feeling. I hate feeling marginalized.
**Rita:** So, we could use the support.

In addition to being something “other than” their “unnatural” situation, nature is a mystery to be figured out, and Rita superstitiously worries that they might somehow tamper with this force.
She insists on throwing away all of the tampons in the house while she is trying to become pregnant, claiming they are “bad luck,” and she chastises Del for reading about miscarriages on the grounds that “just thinking about it” can somehow bring it about. When Rita does in fact miscarry, she sees nature as an angry god:

**Rita:** We got what we deserved. Messing with nature.
**Del:** You don’t think what we do is natural.
**Rita:** We made a baby with a plastic syringe.
**Del:** We made a baby with love.
**Rita:** We’re being punished.

By the end of the play, however, Rita has become pregnant again and they have devoted themselves to constructing a new family model that will work for them. Del, who has resolutely refused to discuss their experience in her newspaper column, finally writes a personal, first-person account and identifies her situation: “I’m not Daddy Del…I’m a woman who loves a woman and we’re going to have a baby. I’m going to be a mother.”

Despite the characters’ determination to do things in a new way, and, by implication, to develop a more consciously chosen and constructed, individual sense of what is natural, the normalizing tone of the play lingers. The penultimate scene makes clear the playwright’s belief that, in a fundamental way, Del and Rita are more like, than unlike, other parents. In discussing the pitfalls of raising a child, Del predicts ruefully, “He’ll hate us because we’re lesbians,” and Rita ironically reassures her, “No, no she won’t. That’s too simple. She’ll hate us for some reason we can’t even dream of.” Onstage, the picture is iconic: Del’s hand is on Rita’s belly and she reacts with joy as she feels movement. Different productions of this play, especially various casting choices, might well have different degrees of success in subverting the TV sitcom format; and despite (or perhaps because of) her choice of this form to appeal to a heterosexual audience, Cole’s content does strongly suggest that she hopes to have a transformative

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effect on them. Interestingly, however, the power of this form is so containing that it manages to undermine the potentially subversive sight of two women onstage embodying lesbian desire and a radically new form of reproduction.

In her introduction to *Performing Feminisms*, Sue-Ellen Case identifies characteristics of feminist theatre theory that, she argues, define both the content and the nature of the field. One of the points that Case makes is that the “double” of feminist theatre is the historical moment in which it takes place, the real material conditions that are addressed by feminist political action and that move within the gestures of the stage. As plays that deal with lesbian motherhood, Cole’s *A Fertile Imagination* and Flacks’s *Bear With Me* are good examples. The performance of either of these plays within their fictional worlds onstage will be constantly echoed by the status of the social issues in the external world which is its “double.” When *A Fertile Imagination* premiered in 1991, Cole and her female partner did not have the legal right to marry in Canada, but by the time of the premiere of *Bear With Me* in 2005, that right had been won. A consideration of the play by a feminist critic, therefore, would likely address how the play and its performance evoke these kinds of “real-life” circumstances and issues for the spectator.

1989 and into the ’90s: The anti-racism mandate

Nightwood has embodied the materialist feminist position most obviously in its commitment to producing work by, and opening up its organizational structure to, women of colour. Feminism became increasingly concerned with issues of race in the late 1980s, as women of colour charged feminism with being run by and for middle-class white women. Nightwood responded by launching SisterReach, an anti-racism campaign aimed at opening the company up to a wider community. The first mention of the new anti-racist agenda was in Nightwood’s inaugural newsletter *Nightwords* (vol. 1 no. 1, Fall 1989). Plays such as *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* (1990) by Monique Mojica and *The Wonder of Man* (1992) by Diana Braithwaite came to represent...
the new face of Nightwood. These plays attempt to construct new identities for their subjects that take into account the conditions of race, class, nationality, sexuality, and other culturally specific factors, in addition to and inseparable from the construction of gender.

Because the women who worked on these productions—as theatre practitioners and members of various communities—were active in the creation and transmission of new cultural values, they affected the audiences who came to see them, inspiring them to initiate projects of their own. In a 1993 interview with the African-Canadian playwright Djanet Sears, reporter Jill Lawless describes Sears as a longtime arts organizer and a powerful force at Nightwood, a woman responsible for its “admirable diversity.” Sears explains:

I’ve been to board meetings and argued policy, helped out with shows, directed shows, chosen shows. But mostly my contribution was just placing certain people in the same orbit. There are a lot of people who are part of my world, so when I joined Nightwood the circle of Nightwood opened. That’s the interesting thing about any predominantly white organization wanting to invite in people of other cultures. You can’t do it just because you think that’s what you should do. And you can’t expect other people just to fit in. You must not only have people of colour in the hierarchy of your organization—you must expand your ideas about your organization. You have to rethink everything, your whole structure. Structures fit some people, but not all people. And with Kate [Lushington] I sensed that openness ... I don’t find Nightwood limited to a single dialectic, which is a very difficult thing to find.57

At that stage, Nightwood’s commitment to a materialist approach to feminism had largely come to define the company, particularly since the anti-racism mandate was implemented. Rather than taking a cultural feminist approach to inclusion by assuming
all women have the same issues, Nightwood had adopted a materialist project of targeting specific women—those previously marginalized within feminism and theatre—and letting their voices be heard.

As Sears suggests, this idea finds its most direct expression in the relationship between company and audience. This is particularly evident at the annual “Groundswell Festival” of new work, where the atmosphere is informal, with audience feedback encouraged in a variety of ways. In 1989, for example, the audience was invited to write comments on the paper-covered tables where they sat, cabaret-style, at the Annex Theatre, while in 1994, a form asking specific dramaturgical questions was enclosed with the program. Kate Lushington emphasized Nightwood’s desire to reach out to a different audience with “Groundswell.” As early as 1988, “Groundswell” had a selection committee made up of women from outside Nightwood who were mandated to take into consideration a wider representation of the theatre community. Participating playwrights were also invited to “Groundtalk,” an informal discussion group led by Susan Feldman (executive director of the Performing Arts Development Fund of Ontario), and were offered feedback from established playwrights including Carol Bolt, Sally Clark, Ann-Marie MacDonald, and Judith Thompson. In an article in NOW, Lushington comments on the cross-fertilization that occurs between participants and audience members at “Groundswell”: “We hope people will come to see the whole Festival, not just one or two readings … We want audiences to see the whole fabric of a developmental process. Maybe some viewers will be inspired to go home and write something themselves. We’re always looking for new material.”

Audience involvement continued to be crucial to Nightwood, as evidenced by the Spring 1996 newsletter, retitled Nighttalk (sometimes called Night Talk). In reference to the annual “Fem-Cab” fundraiser, associate director Soraya Peerbaye writes, “An idea I’ve had of Nightwood for a long time suddenly crystallized, an image of Nightwood being not the handful of women who are the staff, nor the cluster that forms the Board and Advisory, nor
even the multitude of artists who illuminate Nightwood’s productions; it was an idea of Nightwood defined not by its artists, but by its audience.”

In an 1990 article in Performing Arts Magazine, Kate Lushington explains that Nightwood’s anti-racist mandate was to be implemented in four ways: there would be increased representation of women of colour on the board; priority would be given to women of colour when development money was available; various artists connected to Nightwood would be involved in a project called The Colour Collective, based on individual experiences with and attitudes towards racism, and co-written by Lushington and Djanet Sears; and Nightwood would hold a forum targeted at progressive arts organizations. These last two initiatives developed into, respectively, Untitled, created and performed by Lushington, Sears, and Monique Mojica in 1993; and Do the Thing Right, an anti-racist forum that was planned but never materialized. According to Lushington, the forum was abandoned partly because of limited resources and partly because the board felt it had work to do within the company on issues of racism before it attempted to advise outside organizations.

In the 1991 newsletter, in a note about a recent board retreat, the anti-racist mandate is specifically reiterated: “In a key historical moment, the board committed to form an anti-racist policy.” This commitment had already been described in the program for Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots, produced in 1990. The program note again recounts Nightwood’s origins as a four-woman collective and its growth into a collaborative, non-profit, artist-run company with a mandate unique in English Canada: to promote and produce the work of Canadian women playwrights and directors exploring alternative visions of the world. The production of Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots is celebrated as an example of the commitment to anti-racism that would be reflected throughout the next decade. The terms “collaborative” and “artist-run” are significant, in that Nightwood clearly wished to retain its image as an alternative company. The implication is that the collective structure has been outgrown,
but the original spirit—of being alternative and unique in promoting women—has remained. Even the commitment to anti-racism can be read as something newly highlighted, as opposed to a radical change. According to Lushington, one measure that could be considered more radical was a resolution that “we would not do another play until we rethought it—not forever, until we rethought it—with an all white cast.” Nightwood adhered to this resolution throughout the 1990s, opening the door to more performers of colour, such as Djanet Sears and Monique Mojica.

1990: Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots

Monique Mojica’s play *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* was produced by Nightwood in 1990 and published by the Women’s Press in 1991. Mojica had come to Toronto from New York to be a founding member of Native Earth Performing Arts and had taken on a number of significant acting roles: she played Adele Starblanket in Tomson Highway’s *The Rez Sisters*, and the title character in the February 1986 Theatre Passe Muraille production of *Jessica*, directed by Linda Griffiths and Clarke Rogers.

Mojica’s involvement with Nightwood has been extensive, beginning with the 1987 “Groundswell,” when she and Makka Kleist presented *Swindler’s Rhapsody* and Mojica performed in that year’s “FemCab.” In 1991, she was part of Nightworks, an in-house workshop series with Diana Braithwaite and ahdri zhina mandiela, as part of the larger SisterReach anti-racism campaign. By the end of 1991, Mojica was Nightwood’s playwright-in-residence, working on *A Savage Equilibrium*, which was presented at “Groundswell” in 1992, performed by Mojica, Fernando Hernandez Perez, and Jani Lauzon, and directed by Floyd Favel. Mojica was also a member of the planning committee for “Groundswell” that year.

In May of 1993 at the Nightwood Studio, Mojica performed a piece called only *Untitled: A Work in Progress*, a workshop exploration about issues of race and friendship, with Kate Lushington and Djanet Sears. According to the Nightwood newsletter, *Untitled: A Work in Progress*:
investigates the contradictions of race, culture and friendship … Formerly titled The Colour Collective, the group has since dreamed up many titles: Storm Warning in Effect, Cooking Up a Storm, Seven Onion Soup, Bloodlines and Lifelines, Treacherous Remedies for Amnesia, and This Ain’t the June Callwood Show. Fragments were performed at FemCab, and now the creators are joined by animators Michele George, Diane Roberts and Banuta Rubess, and designer Teresa Przybyliski. Cheryl Francis is production stage manager.⁶³

Mojica’s friendship and close working relationship with Sears and Lushington was the subject of their collective piece, in which they explore their common bonds as women (a cultural feminist trait), but also the material condition of their racial differences, all while cooking and serving food to the audience. In 1996, Mojica went on to play a major role in Dilara Ally’s play *Mango Chutney*, and in 2002 she was a member of the chorus in Sears’s *The Adventures of a Black Girl in Search of God*, both Nightwood productions. She continued to be associated with Nightwood as part of an ongoing collaboration called The Turtle Gals.⁶⁴

*Princess Pocahonatas and the Blue Spots* was workshopped by Mojica and Alejandra Nunez, with direction and dramaturgy by Djanet Sears, in the spring of 1988. It was workshopped by Nightwood and Native Earth Performing Arts in May 1989, directed by Muriel Miguel (one of the founders of Spiderwoman, “a radical feminist theatre group,”⁶⁵ and also Mojica’s aunt), and dramaturged by Sears and Lushington. The play was then read at the “Weesageechak Festival of New Work by Native Playwrights” at the Theatre Passe Muraille Backspace in June 1989, and presented at “Groundswell” in November 1989, directed by Sears. It was given a full production at the Passe Muraille Backspace in co-production with Nightwood from 9 February to 4 March 1990, directed by Miguel. The family relationship between Miguel and Mojica is significant in that it relates to the cultural feminist idea of matrilineal tradition and Mojica’s concern with heritage in the play.

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The play has a complex structure, and the two actors onstage play a large number of characters. The published version explains the play’s structure, which consists of thirteen “transformations.” These can be sudden or lingering, but are divided into four sections: “they are the transfigurations of three women who are one.” The playtext stresses that these transfigurations came out of the characters and were not imposed, illustrating the cultural feminist tendency to respect experience and organic process, and to see women as “one,” a unified field of subjecthood. In performance, the distinctions between each character or entity were not as evident as they are when reading the text. As Mojica moved from one transformation to the next in performance, it was as if she were illustrating different aspects of a single subject, the Native Woman.

The tendency to collectivize women is part of what feminist theory objects to in traditional, patriarchal theatre, yet here the technique is clearly intended to establish solidarity rather than to erase individuality. It may help to remember that the main difference lies in who the play is “for”: the traditional male spectator, for whose gaze the Woman is presented, versus the author herself and an audience to whom she wishes to communicate her respect for what she sees as her lineage—her female and indigenous cultural inheritance—by presenting powerful, almost archetypal, images. Ric Knowles and Jen Harvie have described the play as “an antihegemonic revisioning of dominant myths of Native women, written and performed by Mojica out of a strong and resisting subject position, from which its various characters, historical and contemporary, seem to emerge—it can be seen as a kind of spiritual/historical autobiography.

The cultural feminist concern with nature is reflected in the richly detailed mise en scène for *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*. The set, as described in the text and as it appeared in the 1990 Theatre Passe Muraille production, is a pyramid with steps. There is a tree with a platform: a basin, cup, water, red paint, sand, and popcorn; a pole pegged for climbing; faces and clothing of Métis women; a picture frame, cloth, a circle on the floor,
and the foliage of trees. Each prop is transformed into many things over the course of the performance.

The play begins with a scene called “500 years of the Miss North American Indian Beauty Pageant.” Princess Buttered-on-Both-Sides enters, distributing corn, as the Host introduces her. The Princess performs a parodic “Hollywood Injun Dance.” The use of stereotype and satire is employed repeatedly throughout the play and might suggest a more materialist approach to the subject, given the association of parody and satire with materialist textual strategies. This suspicion is reinforced by the next scene, in which the two actors, as Contemporary Women #1 and #2, talk about being a “real Indian” and about how one’s authenticity was traditionally established by the appearance of a blue spot at the base of the spine. There appears to be an awareness of how “realness” is complicated by other factors besides biology, and of how the presence of a physical characteristic (in this case of race, but one could extrapolate to sex) does not guarantee identity.

There is also an investment in truth, however, which the play comes to emphasize through a series of scenes that attempt to tell familiar stories from the perspective of the voiceless female. Pocahontas’s story, for example, is told in both its “storybook” and its “real” versions, suggesting that there is an essential truth to her experience, which can be recaptured by looking at her life from a new perspective. This is very much in keeping with the cultural feminist aim to recreate women’s culture and to reclaim forgotten or neglected women of the past.

The cultural feminist perspective is also evident in an important scene in which Mojica is transformed into the child Matoaka. The musician becomes an entity called Ceremony, beating a rhythm as Matoaka chants a song, entitled “Nubile Child,” about the traditional initiation ceremony for becoming a woman. Mojica paints the outside of her arms and the tops of her feet with red paint, and declares that she is invoking “woman’s time.”

The cultural feminist agenda is complicated here by the
inclusion of a scene about male/female relationships, called “Grandfathers/Stand up.” Contemporary Woman #1 talks about what she finds attractive and familiar about her male partner and discovers his resemblance to her grandfather and his connection with their male traditions. Woman #2 becomes a man and the couple perform a semi-comic routine, with the woman trying to get the man to stand tall on his own feet, to not be drunk or dependent, or pursue white women, but to rebuild their nation. But when she succeeds in making him strong, he leaves her. The scene is not entirely materialist either, however, focusing as it does on an archetypal, non-individualized situation related from the woman’s perspective.

The play continues to explore increasingly grim material, focusing on the abuse of Métis women by their white husbands, the torture of a young woman in Chile, and the murder of the American Indian Movement activist Anna Mae Aquash. In the final scene, entitled “Una Nación,” Contemporary Woman #1 talks about the difficulty of fitting into “feminist shoes,” which do not represent all Aboriginal women. The two actors wash and purify each other. They offer a range of quotations from various writers, culminating in the image of a Rainforest woman confronting a riot squad in Brazil. There is a final dance and a last quote: “A nation is not conquered until the hearts of its women are on the ground.”70

Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots attempts to link the experiences of the Aboriginal peoples of North and South America through a few scenes of parallel storytelling, especially near the end, but mostly through mixing different kinds of music. Mojica is accompanied in performance by a musician, Alejandra Nunez, who is Chilean-Canadian, and who contributed material about the mestiza, the offspring of the Spanish and Native Americans. Mojica, as the child of a Kuna-Rappahannock mother and a Jewish father, is herself concerned with issues of hybridity. As Knowles and Harvie point out, “The myths of Native identity that it attacks or constructs are indiscriminately drawn from all of North, Central and South America; and the hybrid nature of
Native and other ethnicities is asserted at every turn and embodied in the author-performer.”

Mojica’s play is similar to Djanet Sears’s *Afrika Solo* in that it is one woman’s story, but other people on stage also play parts (in both cases, the others are also musicians). In both plays, the woman is responding to her image or absence in popular culture in an attempt to establish an identity, and eventually finds a sense of herself by reclaiming her ethnic heritage. As with Mojica’s mixed parenthood, Sears also has a less than straightforward task: her mother was born in Jamaica and her father in Guyana, and Sears was raised in England and Canada. The experiences of both playwrights/performers are representative of the multicultural, mobile society we live in and the sense of confusion and increased opportunity that can result.

Another example of this phenomenon is the 1993 play *Dryland* by Pauline Peters, a “story cycle” that was performed at “Groundswell” in 1992 and 1993, and then at the Nightwood Studio, which celebrated a Black cultural aesthetic in both language and visual design. Monique Mojica contributed to the show as one of a large collaborative team of designers and facilitators. In an interview in *Night Talk*, Peters expresses her interest in finding a hybrid identity, one rooted in her parents’ heritage as well as her place within Canadian society. Peters explains that, as a second generation West Indian, she feels adrift because her parents have not passed on their stories, preferring to forget the past as part of the process of improving their present lot: “Some of us are desperately seeking black culture and others completely subsumed into white culture. So it’s important to create our own, because stories are what anchor you, give you a sense of belonging in history. It’s a discovery really.”

The task of these plays is multiple: part of their value is therapeutic, enabling the author to give voice to her own experiences and concerns through the process of writing and performing. Furthermore, they attempt to communicate that process to an audience, by way of explanation and education, perhaps, for those of a different background, and as a means of empowering others
with similar circumstances (Sears’s play, for example, toured to high schools in Ontario and was clearly seen as having a valuable message to convey). These goals are consistent with the cultural feminist desire for community, and as a result, the plays exhibit a cultural feminist aesthetic that is affirmative and inspiring for performer and audience alike: they impart a sense of group identification that is tied to geography, artistic expression, common experience, and cultural pride.

Mojica’s more recent work continues to be a boundary-defying mix. As a member of Turtle Gals Performance Ensemble, with Michelle St. John, Sandra Laronde, and Jani Lauzon, Mojica created *The Scrubbing Project*, which was developed at the 1999 and 2000 “Groundswell Festivals,” while the women were in residence for the 1999/2000 season. In 2007, as a trio (minus Laronde), Turtle Gals produced a show called *The Only Good Indian*… which explores the history of Native performers “from the 1880s in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West shows through P.T. Barnum’s side shows, the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair (and other expositions), the silent film era, vaudeville, burlesque, and Hollywood.” Like *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*, the work may not be autobiographical in the traditional sense, but it seeks to place the artist within her very particular lineage. In an article entitled *Stories from the Body: Blood Memory and Organic Texts*, Mojica writes, “First, what you need to know is that I come from a family of show Indians.” She talks about her grandfather making up ceremonial skits and dances to accompany the sale of “snake oil,” and her mother and aunts posing for tourists and riding parade floats wearing feathers and buckskins, as well as providing a place for other Natives who came to New York to dance at the fair or perform in rodeos. Mojica concludes her article by mentioning that she attended an opening for an exhibit at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian called “New Tribe New York,” a retrospective of Spiderwoman Theater, and expresses her pride at dancing on stage with her brother, her brother-in-law and cousins, and her niece, who represents the fifth generation of performers in her family line.
1993: Charming and Rose: True Love

Nightwood’s 1993 production of *Charming and Rose: True Love* serves as another example of how cultural and materialist elements co-exist and can be problematized in feminist theatre. After premiering at the 1992 “Winnipeg Fringe Festival,” Kelley Jo Burke’s play was given a staged reading at “Groundswell” that fall, and then a full production at the Theatre Centre West, directed by Kate Lushington. The play articulates a discourse of natural identity that fits in with the cultural feminist model, and yet maintains a parallel critique of the constructed nature of identity that is more materialist. An opposition is set up between nature and culture, allowing an alternative reading and a route away from what could be considered a problematic essentialism.78

Like *This is For You, Anna, Charming and Rose* uses the fairy tale as a potent device for feminist revisioning. In the 1993 production, the character of Melisande the fairy godmother was played by Djanet Sears. In an interview with *NOW* magazine, Sears comments:

> Myths hold a special place in any society — they are maps of ways to live … Like everyone else who has grown up in western culture, I’ve internalized myths … the whole romantic fairy-tale myth is within me.79

In her book *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, Donna J. Haraway calls myths “meaning-laden public knowledge,” and illustrates the ongoing battle for mythological currency by arguing that

> feminism is, in part, a project for the reconstruction of public life and public meanings … a search for new stories, and so for a language which names a new vision of possibilities and limits. That is, feminism, like science, is a myth, a contest for public knowledge.80

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These quotations outline two particular uses of the term “mythology”: first, the fairy tale as popular lore passed on for entertainment and instruction; and second, the notion of mythology as ideological explanation—the “stories” about sexuality, gender, and race, for example—through which understanding is constructed in a culture. In her introduction to A Feminist Companion to Mythology, Carolynne Larrington argues that myths are “at the centre of a web of meanings, drawn out of the body of the myth by different interpreters for different purposes.”

Myths, here being used in the sense of legends or fairy tales, may have a plurality of meanings at successive stages in their existence; this is particularly the case when mythology becomes the source for artistic creation.

The translation of traditional mythology into the language of contemporary feminism has been considered a powerful tool, both politically and artistically. In her article “Psychic Activism: Feminist Mythmaking,” Jane Caputi argues that part of the agenda of the feminist movement is to “reclaim the symbolizing/naming power, to refigure the female self from a gynocentric perspective, to discover, to revitalize and create a female oral and mythic tradition and use it, ultimately, to change the world.” Caputi defines this as a twofold process, involving both the repudiation of what she calls patriarchal mythology, and the active reinterpretation “of ancient myth, focusing attention on female divinities, supernaturals and powers that have been repressed and silenced”—clearly part of a cultural feminist project.

Is it possible to rework a patriarchal myth (or even one believed to reflect pre-patriarchal beliefs) to feminist purposes without being undermined by its accumulated baggage? Part of the answer lies, of course, in the appeal of the stories themselves. Lena B. Ross, editor of To Speak or Be Silent: The Paradox of Disobedience in the Lives of Women, believes that women in mythology are always associated with disobedience in some way, and speculates that disobedience has “a special and specific value in connection with the feminine archetypes, possibly playing some vital and necessary role in the drama of human life and relations.”

 Breaking Away and Moving On, 1989–1993
suggests that hearing tales of female disobedience may serve a psychological or spiritual need for recipients of the myth.

The feminist storyteller attempts to reclaim female figures from mythology and fairy tale, and to reward them within the context of feminist reinterpretation—not unlike Ann-Marie MacDonald’s agenda in rescuing Shakespeare’s heroines in Good-night Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet). The choice of mythological characters raises particular problems and resonance within a feminist agenda, which are further complicated by theatrical considerations. How does the actor portray a fairy godmother, for example? The presence of the actor’s body serves to naturalize her portrayal, but the purpose of introducing the fairy-tale figure onstage remains complex. The spectator identifies with the creature as something tangible, corporeal, demystified (especially in the case of the gin-swilling fairy godmother in Charming and Rose), but at the same time senses a desire on the part of the playwright to retain some of the potency and promise of the traditional figure—the fairy-tale magic, as it were. The playwright creates a role model, but one with a magic wand up her sleeve; a materialist critique and a cultural transcendence at the same time. Interestingly, casting a woman of colour in this role served to foreground the issues of convention and expectation, heightened further by Sears’s choice to play the character with a West Indian accent.85

In Charming and Rose: True Love, the potential for an essentialist interpretation is most closely associated with Rose, a character defined by her sexuality and fertility, who becomes truly herself only when she returns to her natural state as a “wolf-woman”—an uncomplicated state of pre-patriarchal grace. Rose’s identity as half-wolf and half-human provides a stark contrast to her role in the confines of the castle and court society. The play presents Rose as deeply marked by her experience being raised by the wolf White Paws. Her unfettered “naturalness” attracts Prince Charming to Rose: she is so different from all the other women he knows, so unselfconscious and sexually free. Later, her natural instincts, or “wolf morals,” compel Rose to kill Charming when

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he poses a threat to her pregnancy. At the end of the play, Rose returns to live with the wolves, clearly indicating that it is within a natural, animal realm that she will find her true self, away from the false constructions and alien requirements of patriarchal culture. The natural realm was represented onstage by a film shown at the beginning of the play, a montage of images of wolves in the wild that provided a highly resonant, imaginative reference for the offstage world Rose felt drawn toward.

Yvonne Hodkinson has explained the cultural feminist identification with nature as a reclamation of female power: “The female loss of identity becomes the struggle to regain the ancient correlation with nature in pre-patriarchal society, ‘when Goddess-worship prevailed, and when myths depicted strong and revered female figures.”86 In direct opposition to this positive view, Diane Purkiss has argued against “Romantic” feminism, defining it as an over-determination of woman’s instinctual relationship with nature and “an essentialist notion of a bodily femininity assumed to be reflected in—rather than produced by—the myths they elaborate.”87 Purkiss objects to the blurring of differences between goddess figures from different cultures and expresses apprehension about an ideal of femininity that becomes a kind of transhistoric essence, located in maternity and reproductive capacity. Purkiss argues instead that femininity is itself a product of the culture and language that represses it: “Femininity is, precisely, that which is excluded from patriarchal representations and can only be glimpsed in their gaps and silences.”88 In her view, myths arising from patriarchal culture can only point to the absence, rather than the essence, of the female.

Yet in Charming and Rose, while Rose is assumed to have a natural identity, the image of the princess is deconstructed. The role of any “princess” (read: ideal model of femininity) is explicitly revealed as a construction, a constant deception revolving around appearances. Princess Rose complains, “Princesses don’t swear. Princesses don’t burp. Princesses don’t pass wind, sweat, shit, zit or drool,” to which her fairy godmother, Melisande, replies: “Princesses don’t appear to swear, burp, etc. etc. I never could get
you to grasp the finer points of that principle." The dress that Rose wears serves as a visual theatrical symbol for this deception. The stage directions tell us, "The Dress stands by itself...a construct of wire and fabric." The role of the princess is similarly free-standing and artificially constructed, quite separate from the "reality" of Rose as a girl raised by wolves, and something which, in performance, she was both literally and metaphorically "strapped into." This is an example where the signifier, the dress, relates to the onstage reality of the play, but also bypasses this intermediary step to signify its meaning to the audience directly by announcing itself as a symbol; placed upstage centre for most of the performance, it loomed over the action as a constant reminder of the social roles constricting Rose and Charming and deforming their relationship. The dress, as a metaphor for the social influences on individual circumstances, can also be seen as evidence of the play’s materialist feminism.

It is possible to reconcile the cultural and materialist readings of this play through another model: the suggestion that the attraction mythological figures hold for feminist playwrights and audiences comes not from their “naturalness,” but from their evocation of “monsters.” After all, part of the appeal of the female character lies in her disobedience, even in the ways in which she is transgressive.

The movies are an obvious source to consider for strange and monstrous characters. In her essay “When the Woman Looks,” Linda Williams maintains that the monster in the classic horror movie should not be interpreted as the eruption of repressed male sexuality, but rather as the feared power and potency of the woman—as her double. As Williams explains: “The female look ... shares the male fear at the monster’s freakishness, but also recognizes the sense in which this freakishness is similar to her own difference. For she too has been constituted as an exhibition-object by the desiring look of the male.” The woman’s look at, and identification with, the monster is a recognition of their similar status as threats to male power. The monster and the woman are both “biological freaks with impossible and
threatening appetites that suggest a frightening potency.” Princess Rose fits this description with her remarkable sexual appetite, for example. Williams argues that this is the reason for the strange affinity that often exists between the woman and the monster in the classic horror film; the surplus of danger and excitement when the two are together; and the woman’s sympathy at the monster’s death. For the woman, the monster has been a horror version of her own body, one of the many mirrors held up to her by the patriarchy in which she may view her difference. With Williams’ model, femininity is still located in “difference,” but she switches the focus from a femininity assumed to be natural and biological to one constructed in opposition to, and repressed by, the male norm, and therefore threatening to patriarchal order. In this sense, rather than locating a woman’s power in her reproductive capacities alone, Rose’s relationship with White Paws is seen on the level of woman and monster, with the woman recognizing their common status as dangerous “others.” Throughout the play, Rose is acutely aware that she poses a threat to Charming and his world.

Donna Haraway argues that the search for political identity can lead to “endless splitting and searches for a new essential unity. But there has also been a growing recognition of another response through coalition — affinity, not identity.” Thus, an affinity with the natural world need not lead to a totalizing essentialism, but rather, as with the woman and the monster, to an affinity based on recognition and responsibility, and a rejection of the false dichotomy between nature and culture. In this sense, the female character embodies the monster as part of herself.

For Haraway, women are monsters because they are boundary creatures, holding a destabilizing place in the great Western evolutionary, technological, and biological narratives. Viewed in this light, Charming and Rose is about boundary creatures who, in their status as neither one nor the other, represent a potent threat to the dominant order: Rose is a wolf and a woman, a princess and a murderer, while White Paws is both wolf and mother figure, Melisande is both fairy tale and earthy reality, and even Prince
Charming is both loving and abusive husband. As Haraway argues, “A concept of a coherent inner self, achieved (cultural) or innate (biological), is a regulatory fiction that is unnecessary—in deed, inhibitory—for feminist projects of producing and affirming complex agency and responsibility.” The play is about the search for identity, but concludes that a single identity does not suffice. This is certainly part of the appeal of mythology, in both senses, for the feminist playwright.

Charming and Rose: True Love was written ten years after This is For You, Anna, benefiting from the intervening years of feminist thought and an increasingly complex relationship to all feminist issues, even the issue of violence against women. This is For You, Anna explores the impulse toward revenge, touching upon Marianne’s victimhood and culpability in a way that is both challenging and emotionally direct. Charming and Rose problematizes the abusive relationship in a more ambivalent way, looking at the couple in their (metaphorical) context and suggesting what must be sacrificed to maintain a “fairy-tale” romance.

1993: Kate Lushington leaves, but the issues remain

Two newspaper items from the early 1990s serve to illustrate that, at least in the minds of some journalists, Nightwood’s mandate remained strangely obscure. In 1991, Nightwood’s associate director, Lynda Hill, was interviewed by reporter Malcolm Kelly about an upcoming “Groundswell Festival” for the October issue of the Annex Town Crier. In a subsequent letter to the editor (“Festival is proud of the feminist label”), Hill complained that the resulting article had downplayed the feminist mandate of Nightwood, and of “Groundswell.” The article had even contained the line, “You can’t say this is a feminist festival,” which obviously reflected the reporter’s preconceptions rather than Hill’s.

In 1993, the production of Charming and Rose: True Love marked Kate Lushington’s final directing project at Nightwood before she left the position of artistic director, feeling that it was time for her to move on and let new people run the company. An article in eye magazine discussed both the production and

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Lushington’s resignation, but also signalled an ongoing confusion about Nightwood’s identity as a collective. The eye reviewer describes Lushington as directing a farewell show for “the feminist theatre collective she helped start five years ago.” Of course, on one level this is merely incorrect reporting, as the reviewer mistakes the date when Lushington began working for the company with the date the company was founded. But the use of the term “feminist theatre collective” points to the fact that, even though Lushington had been consistently dissociating Nightwood from the collective label during those five years, it was still perceived as such by this theatre reviewer, and, quite possibly, by some of the theatregoing public.
Kelly Thornton
Kelly Thornton at the Nightwood Office in 2006.
Photograph by Shelley Scott.

Glazed Tempera
Kim Renders and Maureen White in Glazed Tempera.
Photograph by Robert Caspari. From the personal collection of Kim Renders.

China Doll
Marjorie Chan as Su-Ling in China Doll.
Photograph by John Lauener. Nightwood Theatre publicity.

Mathilde
Tom McCamus and Martha Burns in Mathilde.
Photograph by Guntar Kravis. Nightwood Theatre website.
**Distillery District**
The Distillery District in 2006.
*Photograph by Shelley Scott.*

**Age of Arousal**
Clare Coulter and Sarah Dodd in *Age of Arousal.*
*Photograph by Guntar Kravis. Nightwood Theatre website.*

**The True Story of Ida Johnson**
Maureen White as Ida in *The True Story of Ida Johnson.*
This photo became the poster image.
*From the personal collection of Kim Renders.*