

Journeys Towards Healing: Voice and Vision in Contemporary Multi-ethnic Drama in Canada

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In this talk, I shall attempt to demonstrate how the combination of comparative literature and postcolonial theory can contribute to a revitalization of the wider field of humanities. As my case studies will hopefully indicate, this methodology forces us to renegotiate ““otherness”” and the very concept of humanism in an increasingly multi-ethnic world.

Over the past two decades, multi-ethnic drama has formed a prominent feature of Canadian theatre, featuring quasi-canonical works by such playwrights as Tomson Highway, Drew Hayden Taylor and Guillermo Verdecchia, to cite but a few examples.¹⁾ This impulse away from an

1) For further information about multi-ethnic drama in Canada, the reader may profitably turn to Ric Knowles' *The Theatre of Form and The Production of Meaning. Contemporary Canadian Dramaturgies*; to Robert Appleford's edited critical anthology *Aboriginal Drama and Theatre* ; to Birgit Daewes' *Native North American Theater in a Global Age. Sites of Identity Construction and Transdifference* ; and to my own *Transgressive Itineraries*.

exclusive focus on Anglo-Celtic stage production continues to proliferate at the dawn of the new millennium. A myriad of ethnic and First nations playwrights are now building on the tradition established by their elders, thereby further enacting the voice and vision of marginalized constituencies in post-colonial Canada. One of their main concerns still resides in the articulation of the themes of the quest for home, belonging, and identity, in a culturally rigid society. In this essay, I plan to show how similar and yet radically different the plays of these artists can be in their attempts to dramatize a vision grounded in their cultural roots. While the similarity precisely lies in the quest motif itself, the difference can be detected in the socio-cultural inflections of this very theme. My case studies exemplify how it is impossible to homogenize the “Otherness” of these playwrights, a difference expressing itself in the divergent theatrical techniques used by these artists. Drew Hayden Taylor once voiced his opposition to the widespread concept that Native plays should necessarily stage a Trickster, claiming the right of Aboriginal writers to freely experiment with dramatic form (Taylor 28). The danger of ghettoizing Native theatre recalls the issue of Native authenticity, which, as Alan Filewod has rightly pointed out, exists primarily as a nostalgia for a lost innocence in the gaze of Western critics; it is a construct that betrays a reinscription of hegemonic patterns of thought (Filewod 364-365). In these pages, in an attempt to avoid these pitfalls, I plan to focus on Trey Anthony’s *‘Da Kink in my hair*, as an instance of Canadian Jamaican playwriting, Sunil Kuruvilla’s *Rice Boy*, as an example of South Est Asian dramatic writing and Marie Clements’ *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*, as an illustration of a Métis stage work. While they all focus on notions of problematic belonging, these dramas

possess a highly distinctive theatrical idiom. In enacting these journeys towards some kind of epiphanic healing, these playwrights force us to reconsider the boundaries of what constitutes such literary categories as modernism, postmodernism and postcolonialism.

Further, as I shall demonstrate, the works examined in this essay articulate a dramatic aesthetic akin to magic realism. The history of magic realism dates back to the beginning of the twentieth century. In the course of the century it was used to designate various aesthetic forms, including German post-expressionist realism in the twenties, Spanish American marvelous realism and Dutch fictional realism in the fifties (Zamora & Faris 1-11). In its later postcolonial phase, it can be regarded as a literary movement intent on rejecting binary forms of Western rationalist perception, i.e. the clear distinction between ordinary reality and the surreal or indeed the supernatural. As Stephen Slemon has argued, magic realism can be decoded as a (post)colonial manifestation of the “Other” through a subversion of dominant aesthetic patterns (Slemon 407-426). As a number of postcolonial critics have pointed out, the term “magic realism” remains highly problematic for various reasons, not least of which are its Eurocentric underpinnings. Indeed, its oxymoronic nature could seem to foreground the supremacy of mimetic representation in a Western sense.

These difficulties might tempt one to replace the Western concept of “magic realism” with terms coined by Native artists themselves. One case in point is Australian novelist Mudrooroo’s definition of “Aboriginal realism” as a literary mode apparently predicated on the same codes of referentiality as Euro-American dramatic realism, but which subverts them through reminders of the oppressed culture such as the use of myth,

distortion, abstraction, transformations, storytelling and special sound effects. Thus Mudrooroo: ““Aboriginal realism expands European realism by taking in certain supernatural aspects, characters and situations found in Aboriginal storytelling”” (Balme 153). If one turns to North America, Diane Glancy’s own articulation of Native dramatic realism as ““Imaginative realism”” or ““Realized improbabilities”” in *American Gypsy* (201) might prove useful alternatives. However, these terms remain somewhat problematic, mostly through their vagueness, a flaw which in my view can only add to the theoretical confusion. Despite its shortcomings and contentious nature, then, I have chosen to retain the use of the concept of ““magic realism”” in this essay, mostly for want of a clearly better term. The challenge for a Western critic such as myself is therefore to remain strongly aware of the provisional and arbitrary nature of one’s terminology, while refusing to adhere to the assumption that ““magic realism”” merely constitutes a downgraded version of the superior form of unadulterated Western realism.

Numerous variants of magic realism exist in different contexts, about which countless theoretical models have been developed over the years. As I have mentioned elsewhere, I personally favor Jeanne Delbere’s definition of the concept, particularly for its nuanced fluidity (Delbaere 249-63; aufort 22-25). Like Delbaere, I regard magic realism as an aesthetic translating in fiction or, in this particular context, on the stage, the ephemeral and uncanny fusion of apparently irreconcilable objects, ideas or situations, thus rejecting the basic Western rational dichotomy between reality and its contrary. Magic realism, often found only sporadically in plays or in novels, seeks to express the sudden and fleeting transgression of the otherwise

water-tight boundaries between the real and the supernatural. Delbaere articulates three variants of magic realism found to some extent in the plays discussed in this essay. In what Delbaere terms “psychic realism,” a variant on magic realism, the “magic” constitutes “almost always a reification of the hero’s inner conflict” (251). This form of magic realism records the character’s fissured vision of the real. Delbaere’s second subcategory defines a form of “grotesque realism,” which tends to further distort and amplify reality. Delbaere suggests that “grotesque realism” be used “for any sort of hyperbolic distortion that creates a sense of strangeness through the confusion or interpenetration of different realms like animate/inanimate or human/animal” (256). A third subcategory, which Delbaere terms “mythic realism,” emanates from the supernatural features of the environment itself rather than from the character’s psyche (252-53). Magic realism, whose role consists in showing the “interface between realms,” constitutes a prominent feature of the aesthetic project of the works considered in this essay.

I

The first play of the talented African Canadian playwright of Jamaican descent Trey Anthony, *‘da Kink in my hair*, was premiered by Platform Entertainment in association with Theatre Passe Muraille in Toronto in June 2003. Its astonishing success justified its subsequent transfer to such a mainstream venue as The Princess of Wales Theatre in 2005. The play, relying on storytelling, powerfully articulates the quest for identity and

diaspora. It comprises a series of confessions by black women from different backgrounds, who are all clients of hairstylist Novelette. The latter, who probably represents the voice of the author on stage, specializes in African hairstyles. Hence her focus on kinks, a symbol not only of an ethnic hairstyle but of a communal identity. The African Canadian protagonists's kinks are opposed throughout the play to the ideal blond hair of mainstream Canadians. Unlike this type of hair, kinks do tie together the painful stories of these various women and ultimately create their solidarity. Ironically, Novelette herself wears a red wig, which she removes towards the end of the play, a sign of her own cultural emancipation.

The opening scene of Act I reveals Anthony's departure from conventional realism: her African cultural roots are reflected in the supernatural appearance of a Griot, whose tradition of orality this work is indebted to. The play thus includes ritualistic overtones, which bespeak a kind of mythic magic realism: "*The Griot enters, she then calls the Goddess who enters proudly, she blesses the stage. The Griot then calls the dancers/community who enter. They dance, this is a celebratory dance*" (3). This chorus of celebration typifies the entire mood of affirmation of the play. From the start, Novelette indicates the psychological nature of her business: "If you want to know about a woman, a black woman, that is. Touch her hair. Cause our hair carries our journey. 'Cause that's where we carry all our hopes, all our dreams, our hurt, our disappointments they're all in our hair" (5). In subsequent scenes, each of the female clients, while being hairdressed, voice the confessions contained in the kinks of their hair. Shawnette refers to the kink of her hair as a sign of her former well-being. The kink came to symbolize her romance with a man she helped to go

through college. Eventually, she was betrayed by the husband she had sacrificed herself for, because she lacked education. Another woman has now replaced her as the mother of his children. In this first confession, Shawnette illustrates the oppression African Canadian women are subjected to by male patriarchy and its dreams of materialistic success.

While her hair is being done by Novelette, Patsy, the next client, confesses her own story as Griot sings a peaceful tune in the background. She recounts the horrific story of the pain experienced by a mother whose young son, Romey, was killed by a gang. In a typically maternal attitude, she blames herself for not having forced him to wear a protective coat:

PATSY:And I should have just listened to that rotting feeling in my gut and begged him to stay.....Wear your brown coat, Romey, it's a warmer coat! Because he was lying on the ground you know, on the cold hard ground. Bleeding to death. And maybe if he was just wearing his brown coat -- maybe the coat would have kept him -- maybe.....but brown coats don't protect little black boys from eight bullets do they. (21)

This accident illustrates the difficulty of truly belonging in a society in which African Canadians are greeted with indifference. Romey lay on the ground for twenty minutes before anyone called the ambulance. This case in point refers to the wider issue of family fractures in African Canadian communities: "I cried for my sons, cried for our sons" (22). As Patsy is once more pregnant, Novelette reassures her that she can be a good mother again, in the celebratory spirit of the play. She accompanies her claim with a "*little reggae dance*," (23) a symbol of her Caribbean roots.

The next client, Sherelle, has apparently made it in White society, as she

holds a university degree. She confesses that people find it strange that she be so educated, at which point she becomes “an exotic lay” (28). Her crisis of identity leads her to almost erase herself: “.....I put my blackness or lack of blackness in some women of colour box.....” (28). In a phenomenon akin to W.E.B. Du Bois’ notion of double-consciousness, she conforms to White stereotypes of black women. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois described the predicament of African Americans in a White society as follows: “It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others.....” (Du Bois 45), Sherelle feels deprived of an identity: “Lonely. Empty. If I was weak could you hold me up, glue me together, patch me up.....” (28). Her confession ends with an allusion to her eventual suicide. Sherelle’s experience indicts the in-betweenness to which African Canadian people who want to assimilate are in fact condemned. Her predicament also calls to mind Homi K. Bhabha’s notions of hybridity or “in-betweenness” as a flexible pattern of reciprocal cultural exchange between colonized and colonizer: “Hybridity [.....] unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power” (*The Location of Culture* 112). Further, the colonized subject resorts to mimicry, an affect of hybridity (*The Location of Culture* 120), to unsettle the artistic domination of Western dramatic realism. This use of mimicry is clearly subversive and creates an ambivalent, hybrid “Third Space” (*The Location of Culture* 36). It projects a desire for a “reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite. [.....] the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an

ambivalence; [·····] mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry [·····] poses an immanent threat to both ‘normalized’ knowledges and disciplinary powers” (*The Location of Culture* 86).

In a marked contrast, Enid’s confession concludes the first Act on a bright note. She recalls the death of her first husband, for whom she still feels love, and who gave her a home. She nevertheless tells us of her meeting with an elderly man, named Charlie, with whom she starts eating apple pie “‘*seductively*’” (33). Before lights fade, she laughingly exclaims: “‘Mr. Charlie·····I do love me a man who knows how to eat some good pie’” (33), a sentence foreshadowing the healing mood of Act II.

In the second Act, Sharmaine confesses the difficulties of her attempts at becoming an actress in a white world. Although encouraged by her mother, she was always blamed for her blackness: “‘·····they told me I wasn’t White enough, didn’t act Black enough, not short enough, too fat, and too skinny’” (45). Like Sherelle, she is called upon to conform to white stereotypes, a disguised form of oppression. Matters get complicated when Sharmaine discovers her homosexuality. She wanted to “‘Be an actor and love Jasmine. Me loving her, and she loving me’” (45). Being a lesbian made things worse for her, as members of her family started rejecting her, including the mother who had been so supportive before: “‘Mom I—I can’t deal with your silence! I can’t deal with the fact that you can’t bear to look at me anymore!...you didn’t teach me how to fight you’” (46). Obviously, discrimination can come from one’s own community, which makes family fracture even more painful. As the Griot begins to sing, Novelette, assuming the role of a surrogate mother, comfortingly suggests:

“I think, whatever makes you happy makes you beautiful” (46). Stacey-Anne’s confession, delivered in a thick Caribbean accent, describes the protagonist’s difficulties in her Canadian exile. For her, leaving Jamaica meant leaving her Granny and experiencing the throes of diaspora. Although she enjoyed the financial support of Mr. Brown, she was also sexually abused by him, a symbolic form of re-colonization. After her speech, the Griot and the chorus perform a dance of healing, while singing a Caribbean dub poem, a symbolic gesture of identity affirmation: “*STACEY-ANNE begins to hum and GRANNY enters dancing, very dreamlike, the other women enter, and surround STACEY-ANNE, giving her energy and love. And they begin the song and dance of “healing.”……STACEY-ANNE …… recites the following dub poem:……’in honour of belief’*” (51). The song offers an assurance that the child is believed when she claims she was abused. Removing her red wig, Novelette faces the audience, a sign she wants to celebrate her own Jamaican self: “Cause if you’re not ok with the woman inside, nothing else matters” (54). Nia, Novelette’s last client, expresses her grief at the death of her mother, who found it difficult to accept her child’s blackness, an image reintroducing the notion of double-consciousness leading African Canadians to despise their own identity. This image of family fracture is counterpointed by the final celebration of the chorus: “*I’ve been wearing black all my life*” (57). This leads to an epiphanic “*healing song, in which they rock together. They perform a healing ceremony……the dance also offers Nia pride, selfidentit y…… The women dance a celebratory dance*” (57). Novelette concludes the play on this note of identity re-discovered: “*I’ve been wearing black all my life. Blessings*” (57). Thus, ‘*da Kink in my hair*’ offers a modernist

epiphanic solution to the quest for belonging, while attempting to devise theatrical means of expression differing from conventional naturalism. Indeed, the whole structure of the play could be regarded, through its series of confessions, as the unraveling of a huge Jamaican kink.

II

Sunil Kuruvilla's *Rice Boy* had its world premiere at the Yale Repertory Theatre, New Haven, in the U.S.A. in 2000 and was produced in Canada in 2003, by the Canadian Stage Company in Toronto. This play, unlike my other case studies, deals primarily with the diasporic experience of two male protagonists, father and son, who try to adjust to life in Canada, after leaving their native India. Like *'da kink in my hair*, this play is characterized by its affirmative stance, as father and son eventually reconcile and decide to settle firmly in Canada. From an aesthetic point of view, *Rice Boy* relies heavily on the South Indian ritual of kolam patterning. As the author explains in the introduction:

In South India, early each morning, women grind rice and then use the resulting power to create elaborate kolams or patterns on their front porch that disappear within hours. Originally, a Hindu cultural practice, now adopted by others, the creation and destruction of the kolam enacts the struggle to find pattern and stillness amidst the flux of life.the kolam's message: all things are impermanent and should be celebrated for being so. (n.p.)

Taking place alternatively in India and in Canada, the play celebrates

hybridity as a valid form of identity, in a mood reminiscent of the kolam pattern. Its central motifs echo those of *'da Kink in my hair*, i.e., as the author explains in his introduction, "the transitory nature of home, memory, and affection" (n.p.). Kuruvilla deliberately conceived his play as a series of love stories, which recalls the storytelling mode of Trey Anthony's work.

The action takes place in 1975, both in an Indian village called Kottayam and in Kitchener, Ontario. Scenes alternate in a free-flowing way, so that scene 1, set in India, in which Granny and Tina are working on a kolam pattern, blends in with scene 2 in which Tommy and his father converse in Kitchener. This rhythmic pattern of oscillation typifies the entire play. Scene 2 establishes the difference between father and son: while the son feels more assimilated in Canada and denies his Indian roots, his father feels stranded and discriminated against. The Indian scenes evoke Tommy and his father's trip back to India to visit family, a trip which failed to make the father feel at home. Spending time at his uncle's, Tommy falls in love with Tina, his cousin, who is crippled. The uncle wants to arrange a marriage for his daughter, following a typical Indian tradition. Two lines of action need to be identified, revolving respectively around the Tina/Tommy (located in India) and the Tommy/father relationships (located in Canada).

An analysis of the "Indian" scenes reveals difficulties of belonging and unrequited love. Tommy's courtship with Tina eventually becomes a sort of game, in which he plays being the Husband and she performs the role of the Bride. As such, they both explore Indian cities, venturing beyond Tina's house against all established traditions regarding the proper conduct of young daughters. Interspersed into these love scenes are the father's

confession to his brother that he no longer feels at home in India: “There is nothing for me here” (40), a sign of his in-betweenness. In a subsequent scene, the preparations for Tina’s wedding show her literally drowning in the saris she is asked to choose for the ceremony, an ominous feeling indeed: “Colour,/Colour,/Swim,/Swirl,/drown” (54). The Indian family fracture is revealed in one of Auntie’s speeches: “Eventually you will be unhappy but not in the beginning. You will understand all that I’m saying when your marriage becomes like mine……I think about leaving your father sometimes……” (61). Shortly before her marriage, Tina decides to allow Tommy to touch her damaged legs, which can be construed as a symbol of her oppression in Indian society. Shortly after this epiphanic moment of intimacy, Tina disappears from her home, probably in an attempt to avoid her arranged marriage. The Indian scenes thus conclude on a frustrating sense of loss of identity.

A close-reading of the “Canadian” scenes underlines the quest for identity motif. Tommy’s mother has died during a trip to India: “My mother drowned 10 years ago when we went to India……She swam there everyday when she was a girl but she forgot where the dangerous spots were” (20). Lack of cultural memory symbolically killed his mother. In addition, Tommy feels estranged from his father, and his quest is both for roots and a father image. In one of the Canadian scenes, the ghost of Granny evokes the death of the mother, advising the father: “You lost your wife. Go find your son” (35). Despairing of ever winning his father’s trust, Tommy even decides to serve as a surrogate son to a Mr. Harris, whose son strangely disappeared: “Mr. Harris. I don’t have blond hair or blue eyes. I’m taller ……but I can be your son” (37). His gesture symbolically

reveals his desire to assimilate into mainstream Canadian society. However, Mr. Harris finds it irritating that Tommy does not conform to the model of his lost son. Mr. Harris finally dismisses him: ““For a few moments you made me feel better. Thank you. You should leave”” (51). A highly symbolic scene shows him going through a Canadian cornfield which he tries to penetrate and to fertilize with his own sperm:

TOMMY: I know where babies come from. I've got little seeds inside of me. I'm going to plant one in this cornfield. Come summer I'll have a baby. A new Tommy. Good Tommy. Canadian.....*Angrily, he hits the frozen ground then unzips his trousers. He rubs into his hands, grinding against, but unable to penetrate, the soil.....Then he lies still.* (55).

This scenic image once more suggests Tommy's in-betweenness: his desire to assimilate remains unfulfilled in a pattern recalling Bhabha's notion of uncomfortable hybridity. In a sudden apparition, Granny ““*starts to make a rice pattern around her sleeping grandson*”” (62). She assures Tommy that Tina is still alive, roaming somewhere in search of a home. For Tommy, the loss of Tina represents his loss of Indian traditions. He invokes heaven in a desperate attempt to overcome this hybridity: ““Tina.....I think you're in heaven but I need to know for sure. Where are you?”” (64). No answer can be provided until the last epiphanic scene, which takes place in Canada. This neat coda weaves together the different lines of action of the play.

In this pivotal scene, the father meets his son ““shivering under a tree,”” and joyfully exclaims ““I found you”” (71). The father's successful quest for his son counterpoints the uncle's failed search for the disappeared Tina. The father persuades his son to let go of the memory of both Tina and his

mother, i.e. memories of a romanticized India: “No more talking to ghosts” (75). As Tommy confesses he wants to change who he is, the father gives him confidence in his hybrid self: “I’m like you. You go from point A to point B. Then back to A. Then back to B. In between. Living nowhere. Not Canadian but not Indian” (74). This celebratory mood recalls the affirmative stance of *‘da Kink in my hair*. Again, it brings to mind Homi Bhabhi’s notion of a fruitful “Third space,” one that relies primarily on interstitial identities. The last moments of the play enable us to witness the epiphanic reconciliation between father and son: “Come Tommy. Let’s go home” (75). The conclusion provides the reconstruction of a home for the two lonely men: “Come close Tommy. Not a straight line. Do zigzag. We’re the same. Boys without girls……the world is spinning. Flipping Can you see me? Try” (76). Tommy’s emphatic reply “I see you” constitutes the positive coda of the play (76). The zigzag spinning of the two protagonists echoes the kolam pattern executed by Tina and Granny at the beginning of the work, thus providing a sense of a circular structure. Further, one could argue that the overall form of the play resembles that of a kolam pattern, in its very fluidity and its attempt to evade the boundaries of conventional stage naturalism. The kolam structure, like the kink in Trey Anthony’s play, thus constitutes the signature of the author’s and the protagonists’ cultural memory.

III

Métis playwright Marie Clements’ *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*

premiered at the Firehall Arts center in Vancouver in November 2000. Conceived as a typically postcolonial rewriting of neglected facts of the official historical record, it dramatizes a series of murders which occurred some twenty years ago in Vancouver's "skid Row" area. All of these women at some point were seen in the company of a Gilbert Paul Jordan, who was known to target Native women. Marie Clements, in evoking on the stage the lost souls of these women, shows how these Native women were crushed by the oppressive patriarchy of the (post)colonial system. The aesthetic of this play is by far the most complex of all my case studies, with which it undoubtedly shares the quest for identity motif. Its structure relies on extreme fluidity, one blending the real and the supernatural in a quasi magic realist mode. This kind of magic realism, rooted in the female protagonists' consciousness, can be construed as what Delbaere terms psychic magic realism.

As the playwright indicates in the description of the setting, Rebecca's journey in Act I should be decoded as the symbol of her growing up through memory. The opening scenes asks for slides to project excerpts from *The Vancouver Sun* concerning the coroner's reports about these unaccounted for deaths. They all presumably were of unknown, but "unnatural and accidental" causes, always involving excessive drinking. The play seems to correct that fallacious perspective.

Rebecca's father used to be a White logger. Her mother, Native Aunt Shadie, decided to leave her family when Rebecca was still a child. Hence the aim of Rebecca's quest. The tragedies of the various women are re-enacted through her mind and through her writing talent. Indeed, we know from the start that she has a story to finish: "I'm sitting here

thinking of everything that has passed, everyone that is gone and hoping I can find her, my mother” (371). The theme of the fractured family unit echoes *‘da Kink in my hair* and *Rice Boy*.

The ensuing Act I revolves around the description of the various women’s solitudes, including that of Aunt Shadie. One of the women, Rose, comes from England, the former center of the Empire. Being a receptionist, she connects people together and the telephone image resonates throughout Act I, as the women try to get friends and family members on the phone: “ROSE: I’ve always been right here. No matter where I am, I am in-between people connecting……being there always it seems just listening to voices looking for connection, an eternal connection between women’s voices and worlds” (375). These lines obviously call to mind Bhabha’s notions of liminal identities. However, Rose’s desire to really connect lamentably fails, as she is herself killed mysteriously. Only the hybrid Rebecca, the symbol of a New World order, somehow manages in the end to transform the women into a chorus of voices through her writing. Through the power of re-memory, to borrow a phrase drawn from Tony Morrison, Rebecca enables them to belong at long last.

At various intervals during Act I, the silhouette of the rapist-killer is seen in a mute reenactment of his murders. This murderer is depicted as a barber, an ironic counterpoint to Novelette’s soothing and maternal qualities. As is the case with Marilyn: “*He turns the barber light on, and it begins to slowly rotate –a red and white swirl. He places a bottle between her legs and tenderly begins to braid her hair in one long braid. He suddenly grabs her braid roughly and takes his scissors to cut it*” (380). The braid signifies the Native identity of these women. Its cutting refers not only to

actual murders but to the wider oppression of an entire culture by White society. The women are metaphorically drowned in drink by the barber.

As we move towards the end of the Act, the women are linked by a song, sung both in English and in the Native language. This device lends a particularly flexible structure to the play: “*“The women in the barbershop call to each fallen woman, in each solitary room……Throughout, the song floats in and out of each scene, submerging under some, and taking over others, flowing like a river. Each call and response a current”*” (405). When reaching the conclusion of the first act, the women are no longer designated by their singular names but simply as a chorus. The chorus’s bilingual incantation reinforces the notion of fluidity: “*“My bodies floating where all the days are the same……My hair drifts behind me”*” (410-11). Thus, the last line of the first act again alludes to the women’s lost braid, a reaffirmation of their destroyed identity.

Act II, which takes place in Rebecca’s apartment in Kitsilano, could be described as psychic magic realist, blending as it does the real and the supernatural. Indeed, the voices of the dead women keep haunting Rebecca and can actually be seen on the stage. She thus begins to remember, i.e. to put together the different facets of her self: “*“I remember me. I remember everything”*” (422). Aunt Shadie suddenly confesses the reason why she left Rebecca and her father: “*“I didn’t want her to see me the way he began to look at me……I could feel myself disappearing, becoming invisible in his eyes……I began to hate seeing myself through his eyes……I was afraid she would begin to seem the way he saw me, the way white people look up and down without seeing you—like you’re not worthy of seeing. Extinct, like a ghost……being invisible can kill you”*” (424). The cause of

the family fracture apparently resided in the fear of what W.E.B. Du Bois' described as double-consciousness. Aunt Shadie also defines whiteness as a state of mind, not as a racial attribute: "'White is a blindness—it has nothing to do with the colour of your skin'" (424). This rejection of stereotypes is further echoed in Rebecca's conversation with a policeman called Ron, who fails to understand why Rebecca does not look Indian. Her hybridity is not acknowledged as a valid form of identity. Exclaims Rebecca: "'What does an Indian seem like? Let me guess—you probably think that, if an Indian goes to University or watches T.V., it makes them the same as every other Canadian. Only less. The big melting pot. The only problem is you can't melt an Indian. You can't kill a stone'" (436). Clements thus indicts the false dream of the Canadian mosaic.

In the epiphanic last scene of Act II, Rebecca, the women and Gilbert the barber meet at a bar, the Empress. The barber tries to seduce Rebecca into his shop. The whole scene could be viewed either realistically or as a dream, or as a projection of Rebecca's written form of exorcism, a marker of psychic magic realism. Rebecca discovers the braids of the killed women in one's of the barber's drawers: "'*She picks her mother's braid up and buries her face in it and sobs*'" (4555). In an act of revenge, she decides to shave the barber and to slit his throat. This ritual killing is performed in a psychic and/or mythic magic realist scene, in which the dead women also participate. The mythic overtones are suggested by the overriding presence of the Native landscape. In a striking reversal, the barber is now mutilated by the women he put to death: "'*AUNT SHADIE……emerges from the landscape ……She puts her hand over REBECCA's hand and draws the knife closer to the BARBER's neck. He looks up and panics as he sees*"

AUNT SHADIE and the WOMEN... behind her. Squirming, they slit his throat” (458). This ritual killing enacts the victory of First Nations people over the oppressive systems of imperialism, embodied by the barber.

In the epiphanic coda, which in a typical psychic magic realist moment blends dream and reality, “REBECCA hands each woman her braid ……hands her mother her braid of hair” (458). This moment of reconciliation epitomizes the reconstruction of identity and community through the power of Rebecca’s artistry. Rebecca has endowed all the dead women with their lost identity. Rebecca has ended her quest for her mother, and by metaphorical extension her own self. She now feels ready to accept her Native roots. The women then unite in “*THE FIRST SUPPER –NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH THE LAST SUPPER……the sound of their voices becomes the sound of trees*” (459). Contrary to the ominous connotations suggested by Christ’s last supper, this meal constitutes a celebration of life and of a newly acquired confidence in one’s identity. As Rebecca “continues walking” (459) in the concluding moments of the play, we know she has retrieved a sense of home and belonging. The successful journey towards healing that Clements’ play dramatizes clearly aligns this work with *‘da Kink in my hair* and *Rice Boy*.

As I hope my three case studies have shown, multi-ethnic drama in Canada at the dawn of the millennium is characterized by a highly innovative aesthetic enabling its practitioners to give a potent voice to marginalized communities. Through their non-Western devices of theatrical expression,

these playwrights manage to articulate powerful dramatic visions of the search for a home and identity. The three plays I have analyzed share a celebratory attitude towards the notion of in-between subject positions, in a mode of affirmation reminiscent of Homi Bhabha's "'Third space.'" While these artists's journeys towards healing echo the postmodern concern with what Linda Hutcheon termed the "'ex-centric,'" their eventual stance, unlike that of postmodernism, does not reject the certainties of the past but rather reinscribes these signatures of cultural memory (Hutcheon). Clearly, then, these dramaturgies will increasingly prompt us to redefine Canadian drama in the 21st century. By extension, the type of dramaturgical and comparative approach I have developed in this talk can serve as an illustration of the new ways in which humanities can explore the dynamics of our everchanging contemporary world.

◆ Works Cited

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