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## Arthur Milner

Arthur Milner is a theatre director and playwright, and is currently teaching a course in modern drama at Carleton University.

He is an editor of *Inroads*.

His radio play, *It's Not a Country* *It's Winter* was published in *Inroads* 6. His new play, *The Forest* will be produced by the Great Canadian Theatre Company in Ottawa in September 2001.

# Rehabilitating naturalism

**A**RTHUR MILNER HAS WORKED IN professional theatre for 25 years. In this essay, he explores problems in contemporary theatre criticism and, by implication, cultural criticism in general. He traces theatre history through the birth of naturalism in the 1870s and the anti-naturalist rebellion that followed it, and explains why contemporary dramatists still refer to certain work as *avant garde* or experimental, even though the "experiment" has, according to Milner, long since ended. Using as example the work of Canadian playwrights Tomson Highway and George F. Walker, Milner examines the contribution of poststructuralist academics. While many critics and theatre artists dismiss naturalism as *passé* or "dangerous," Milner argues that naturalism has changed immensely in the last 100 years, and the best of contemporary playwriting remains essentially naturalistic.

ACCORDING TO PROFESSOR W. B. WORTHEN, EDITOR OF WHAT IS PERHAPS THE anthology most often used in North American academic drama classes, Henrik Ibsen "established the contours of modern realistic drama," and his 1879 play, *A Doll's House*, "was a rallying point for international feminist demands for the vote and for other legal rights and protections for women."<sup>1</sup>

But in the same anthology, Worthen tells us that, "Because realistic drama usually sees that world ['the dominant political and ideological order'] as an all embracing 'environment'...its social themes don't finally lead to a call for social change."<sup>2</sup>

How can a play that "was a rallying point for international feminist demands" be an example of a type of theatre that cannot, by its very nature, "lead to a call for social change"?

Worthen's "paradox" is not a simple error. Rather, it underscores a common misunderstanding of the history of realism (and naturalism), as well as serious problems of contemporary theatre criticism. And while the subject here is theatre, similar problems exist in cultural criticism as a whole.

To begin, we need to define "realism" and "naturalism." According to British critic Bamber Gascoigne, "The meaning of 'naturalism' is beyond dispute – it represents a style of theatre in which the stage setting, the dialogue of the characters and the performance of the actors seem 'life-like'.... Naturalism reflects accurately the surface of life, whereas realism is concerned with the truth of the experience conveyed."<sup>3</sup>

Gascoigne's efforts to distinguish between naturalism and realism are pretty much a lost cause; few current writers, even academics, use the terms with his precision. Moreover, what we accept as naturalism changes over time.

Strictly speaking, naturalism need not be narrative, i.e. need not entail the telling of a story. If I were to perform on stage two hours of my sitting at this computer, it might well be "life-like," but it wouldn't generally be considered naturalism.

It should be kept in mind, too, that, as Raymond Williams points out in *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*,<sup>4</sup> naturalism (or realism) shouldn't be mistaken for "natural" or "real." An actor pretending to be a servant or a

general, on a Russian estate at the turn of the century, in front of an audience going along for the ride (“suspending disbelief”) is no more “real” than any other theatrical convention.

In *The Triumph of Narrative*, Canadian journalist Robert Fulford writes,

*Of all the ways we communicate with one another, the story has established itself as the most comfortable, the most versatile – and perhaps the most dangerous. Stories touch all of us, reaching across cultures and generations, accompanying humanity down the centuries. Assembling facts or incidents into tales is the only form of expression and entertainment that most of us enjoy equally at age three and age seventy-three.*<sup>5</sup>

One need only watch television, go to a popular play or movie, or read popular novels to verify the truth of Fulford’s statement. And this is not new: *Oedipus Rex* and *Hamlet* are, after all, stories; the most popular parts of *The Bible* have always been its stories. Of course, stories, like *Hamlet* and *Bambi*, don’t have to be naturalistic.

## Revolt and counter-revolt

Émile Zola is generally credited with the “invention” of naturalism in theatre:

*The experimental and scientific spirit of the century will enter the domain of the drama, and in this lies the only possible salvation of the drama. . . . We must look to the future and the future will have to do with the human problem studied in the framework of reality. The drama will either die or become modern and realistic.*<sup>6</sup>

Zola’s essay was to become a kind of naturalistic manifesto, but if Zola proclaimed the revolution, Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* embodied it: a commercial and, eventually, critical success, in which ordinary characters (not Gods or kings), amidst ordinary bourgeois furniture (not painted backdrops), conversed in ordinary language (not poetry) about more-or-less everyday problems.

For the next 20 years, through Anton Chekhov, the early works of August Strindberg, and the younger George Bernard Shaw (he died in 1950 at age 96), naturalism was the avant garde of its day – so avant garde that it shocked audiences (of course!) and required the invention of a whole new kind of acting. Before naturalism, star actors stood at centre stage (near the prompter’s box and where the light was best) with lesser mortals spread out on either side. They faced the audience as they spoke, gesturing occasionally to indicate they were “really” speaking to a character beside them. Along comes naturalism and suddenly actors had to face each other and pretend the absence of the audience. They didn’t like it.

After writing a couple of the classics of naturalism, Strindberg had a change of heart, deciding that “The higher fantasy has a greater reality than this actuality. The banal accidents of existence are not essential life,”<sup>7</sup> and wrote his dream-like *Road to Damascus* (1898). By 1921 and Luigi Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (in which six “fictional” characters invade a “real” rehearsal to tell their story), naturalism was already passé.

Through the first half of the 20th century, “avant garde” and “experimental” playwrights and directors explored alternatives

to naturalism: expressionism, impressionism, surrealism, symbolism, mechanism, futurism, dadaism, formalism, constructivism, functionalism, The Theatre of Cruelty, epic theatre (Brecht), poetic realism, absurdism and more.

All the anti-naturalists proclaimed the death, deceit and/or limitations of naturalism. Irish poet and playwright W. B. Yeats, nostalgic for the “beauty” of earlier forms, decried Ibsen’s prosaic vulgarity. French dramatist Antonin Artaud, in pursuit of direct and unconscious communication between artist and spectator, proposed “a theatre in which violent physical images crush and hypnotize the sensibility of the specta-

**How can a play that “was a rallying point for international feminist demands” be an example of a type of theatre that cannot, by its very nature, “lead to a call for social change”?**

tor.”<sup>8</sup> For Brecht, the goal was communism and the method *Verfremdungseffekt*; “alienated” from the performance, spectators would be forced to coldly analyze events on stage and, by implication, capitalism. André Breton, founder of the Surrealists, was also a Communist; his methods, however, resembled those of Artaud.

In retrospect, none of this should be surprising. The history of Western theatre reflects the history of Western society. Anti-naturalism was an attack on rationalism and the Enlightenment. Science, industrialization, the free market, “scientific” Marxism – each had been hailed as saviour, each had failed. It’s not surprising that the Absurdists came last: in Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for*

*Godot* (1957), there’s nothing to do but wait for a God who never comes. In the face of continuing poverty, two world wars, Germany’s death camps, and Stalin, what more was there to say?

## “Everything changes – except the avant garde”

Of course, naturalism and narrative did not disappear. Jean-Paul Sartre, who wrote one of the classics of absurdism (*No Exit*, 1944), also wrote a naturalistic critique of Stalinism (*Dirty Hands*, 1948). Moreover, “popular” theatre remained naturalistic. For example, starting in the 30s, British playwright Terrence Rattigan wrote a dozen serious and very successful plays (e.g. *The Last Dance*, 1938; *The Winslow Boy*, 1946), but his work is barely mentioned by theatre historians. And that is the point. To get into the histories, you’ve got to be – or appear to be – “Original.”

But by 1960 – to be generous – everything had been done. Audiences could no longer be shocked by the breaking of convention; none remained to be broken. As Gascoigne wrote, in 1962,

*Memory in the theatre is surprisingly short. . . . After eighty years in pursuit of Originality, the avant-garde cannot afford to look behind itself. Rather than risk not seeming new, it still boasts of having just knocked down that hoariest of Aunt Sallies, the well-made play. . . . It is the period from 1880 to 1930 [which includes naturalism] that theatre historians of the future will regard as the age of experiment, as the true hey-day of avant-gardisme. In those years the bounds of theatre were stretched to their utmost limits, and sometimes beyond.*<sup>10</sup>



The plays of Henrik Ibsen, pictured here in about 1879, became a commercial and, eventually, critical success. His plays featured ordinary characters (not Gods or kings) amidst ordinary bourgeois furniture (not painted backdrops), conversing in ordinary language (not poetry) about more-or-less everyday problems.

*themselves off as natural, which offer themselves as the only conceivable way of viewing the world, are by that token authoritarian and ideological.... In Barthes' view, there is a literary ideology which corresponds to this "natural attitude," and its name is realism.*<sup>11</sup>

One can see Barthes' influence in Worthen's statement that realistic drama can't "finally lead to a call for social change."

This notion that "the structure is the message"<sup>12</sup> is an interesting one. It does seem counter-intuitive: isn't it the content that matters? A play about the oppression of women might move me, make me think, lead me to change my behaviour. Why should the structure of realism mean that, as Worthen says, it can't "finally lead to a call for social change"? Why should form or structure have any impact at all?

The various revolutionaries used periods, commas and upper case letters where appropriate in their manifestoes and analyses. Poststructuralists write badly, it's true, but they write in sentences with verbs and nouns and divide their books into chapters.

Nonetheless, contemporary anti-naturalists see naturalism as old-fashioned and conventional and consider their own work avant garde and experimental. In maintaining this fiction, they've had a great deal of help from academics, for whom naturalism is not so much out-of-date as downright dangerous. French poststructuralist Roland Barthes is typical. Barthes sees as a "healthy sign"

*one which draws attention to its own arbitrariness – which does not try to palm itself off as "natural"... Signs which pass*

Guelph University professor Ric Knowles calls for "dialogistic" (rather than "monologicistic") theatre, but in his own writing a single "authorial voice" apparently satisfies him.<sup>13</sup> Knowles' goals are explicitly political. His project, he writes,

*is, in a sense, to politicize form, to examine form itself as a material agent of cultural affirmation (or reproduction), on the one hand, or cultural intervention, on the other. I want...to ask what cultural work is done by different dramatic forms and different dramaturgical structures, whatever the subject matter or thematic content of the works.*<sup>14</sup>

Setting up his argument with quotations from Freud and a handful of poststructuralist critics, and tracing contemporary naturalism from its Aristotelian roots, Knowles "proves" his point – that form is a material agent of cultural intervention – by citing Teresa de Lauretis. De Lauretis, Knowles tells us, explores,

*the connection between oedipal desire and narrative. Beginning with the observation that "sadism demands a story, depends on making something happen, forcing a change in another person, a battle of will and strength, victory/defeat, all occurring in a linear time with a beginning and an end," de Lauretis demonstrates that the linear narrative constituting Aristotelian 'action' is governed by a (sadistic) oedipal logic"<sup>15</sup> (parentheses in original).*

Like ancient Scolastics arguing about angels on a pin and medieval doctors explaining bloodletting, poststructuralists build their arguments one tiny, logical step at a time. Medieval bloodletters didn't know about empirical research. Poststructuralists

have no such excuse.

Knowles tells us that "the politicization of form" is not a new project, that before 1928, the Russian Formalists "strove to attribute deep ideological meaning to form."<sup>16</sup>

Seventy-five years of theory should be enough. Surely it's time to actually test these claims: to what extent, if any, is "form" "a material agent of cultural affirmation?"

## Modern criticism and its consequences

The first university literature departments, in the second half of the 19th century, taught the "appreciation" of literature: the great works of great minds. But soon professors of literature sought to justify their presence in universities by emulating their colleagues in the more rigorous physical and social sciences. By the time of the Russian Formalists, the study of literature looked a lot like linguistics, less concerned with "What does this mean?" or "What can we learn from this?" than with "How does this work?" Throw in a little Marx, a little Freud and a little Claude Lévi-Strauss and the result is poststructuralism.

For poststructuralists, language is both "fluid" and "socially constructed." Because language is fluid, i.e. has more than one meaning, it is the reader who creates meaning, not the writer. And because language is socially constructed, it reflects not reality but existing power relations.

If the reader creates meaning, then there is no such thing as quality (it's just an ideological construct), and the films of John Wayne are as valid a focus of study as the plays of Shakespeare. If writing can't describe reality, there's no point in analyzing writing for its *insights* into, say, existing

power relations; instead, one “deconstructs” the “text” in search of ideological “signs.” Thus certain forms, particularly naturalism, get to be manifestations of sexist, racist, capitalist and/or imperialist culture.

The result is that no one discusses what anything is about, and no one talks about quality. Writing is praised or denounced for its conformity with – or in the case of early writing, anticipation of – poststructuralist prescriptions.

Take the case of Knowles’ discussion of Tomson Highway’s *The Rez Sisters* (1986). Highway “relies heavily on structural principles drawn from music,” says Knowles, and “perhaps it is the capacity of the form for the comfortable containment of potentially disruptive social concerns that accounts for [*The Rez Sisters*]’ success and popularity.” Not only that, but “This formal conservatism can potentially admit the ‘colonizing gaze’ of a non-Native audience.”<sup>17</sup> Knowles never discusses what *The Rez Sisters* is about – seven Native women trying to get to Toronto for the biggest bingo game ever – and what it might mean. Knowles’ only concern is the ideological implications of form.

Knowles barely mentions Highway’s later, stunning and provocative *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* (Fifth House, 1989). I’ve read many reviews of and commentaries on the play. Most mention Highway’s theatrical use of images from Native mythology, as well as the harsh imagery in a scene in which a young Native man, a victim of fetal alcohol syndrome, rapes a Native woman with a crucifix. Some critics comment on the play’s negative portrayal of Natives.<sup>18</sup>

No one talks about the story: A man, Zachary, wakes up in a friend’s home. He has lost his underwear after, apparently,

sleeping with a woman who is not his wife. As he searches for his underwear, we meet six more men living on the reserve and witness a number of harrowing events, including the rape referred to above. The women of the reserve, who don’t appear on stage, have started to play in a women’s hockey league, and some of the men are unhappy about this. The men are brutal, pathetic and/or silly. The one possible exception dies when, drunk and despairing, he accidentally shoots himself. Zachary, too, in constant search for his underwear and for apple pie recipes – he wants to open a bakery – seems silly. In the end, Zachary wakes up. It’s all a dream. He’s in a nice, clean apartment decorated with Native and non-

**For 20 years, naturalism was the avant garde of its day – so avant garde that it required the invention of a whole new kind of acting.**

Native artifacts. His wife hands him their infant daughter. Zachary tries to teach her a few Ojibway words. His wife, laughing, corrects him. According to the script, “The last thing we see is this beautiful Indian man lifting his naked baby Indian girl up in the air, his wife sitting beside them watching and laughing.”

Oppression at the hands of whites forms a kind of background to the events, but is barely mentioned in the play itself. One man, a born again Christian, argues with another about Native versus Christian spirituality and traditional versus modern medicine. There is the crucifix/rape symbolism. One man, we learn, had participated in the 1973 battle of Wounded Knee, but says, when forced to explain why he didn’t stop

the rape, “Because they – our own women – took the fuckin’ power away from us faster than the FBI ever did.”

In a long and anguished cry, Zachary laments conditions on the reserve:

*“What’s happening to this place? What’s happening to these people? My people. [...] God of the Indian. God of the Whiteman. [...] Why are you doing this to us? Are you up there at all? Or are you some stupid, drunken shit, out-of-your-mind-passed-out under some great beer table up there in your stupid fucking clouds? [...] I dare you to come down from your high-falutin’ fuckin’ shit-throne up there, come down and show us you got the guts to stop this stupid, stupid, stupid way of living. It’s got to stop. It’s got to stop. It’s got to stop. It’s got to stop. It’s got to stop. It’s got to stop.”*

What can it mean that colonial history and contemporary white society are largely absent from this play? What can it mean when its hero – what else can Zachary be?

**By 1960 – to be generous – everything had been done. Audiences could no longer be shocked by the breaking of convention; none remained to be broken.**

– runs a bakery and lives in a nice apartment with his wife and child? What can it mean that Zachary’s wife corrects his Ojibway, but it’s a source of amusement, not urgency? What can it mean that the final image of the play is a happy nuclear family?

*Dry Lips* won the Chalmer’s Award and the Governor General’s Award. It’s been performed across the country, including a run

at Toronto’s Royal Alex Theatre, one of the few Canadian plays they’ve ever presented. (Is this because *Dry Lips* “can potentially admit the ‘colonizing gaze’ of a non-Native audience?") Critics and academics comment on its images, its structure, and perhaps its portrayal of the difficult lives of Natives. None ask the difficult or controversial questions. Of course it’s far easier for politically sensitive poststructuralist academics to comment on “the production of meaning,” and avoid the possibility that the major Native Canadian playwright might be suggesting that blaming history doesn’t help, that entrepreneurship isn’t a bad idea, and that restoring “family values” is crucial.<sup>19</sup>

## Naturalism returns

Is *Dry Lips* naturalistic? Most would say no. It’s full of images, it’s structured as a dream, it jumps around in time, it’s got a trickster character who takes many forms and is invisible to the “real” characters. That’s enough to escape the label of “naturalism” and the wrath of critics and theatre artists nostalgic for the avant garde.

About 15 years ago, I saw a Danish play whose name I’ve likely blocked. The set is covered by a translucent plastic sheet. Actors dressed as construction workers wandered about, under the sheet, using electric saws and grinders to send sparks flying. As far as I remember there was no dialogue. It was eerie and visually interesting for about five minutes.

Six or seven years ago, I saw *The Freud Project*, by Canadian playwright and director Paul Bettis. The program announces that we’re about to see a “rules play,” though we’re not told the rules. Three actors each pick two cards from a deck, look at the cards, replace them, and walk over to an

elegantly furnished Victorian “room.” The actors’ short speeches seem to make sense, but as dialogue it’s incomprehensible. After a while it seems that some of the speeches are taken from other plays – perhaps they all are, perhaps even from Victorian-era plays, but the snatches come out randomly; it’s impossible to connect one speech with the next. After a while the actors stop. A brief musical interlude. Then the actors draw new cards, and the scene is repeated, five or six times, with different snatches of speech but still incomprehensible. Halfway through, the actors serve us cognac. After about 80 minutes we’re allowed to go home.

One can always “find” meaning. (The poststructuralists aren’t entirely wrong; language is somewhat fluid; meaning is somewhat constructed. That’s why it’s good – and informative – to discuss possible meanings.) A CBC reviewer asked what I thought of the Danish play. “I had no idea what was going on,” I said. “But that’s what I loved about it,” she answered. But now that I think about it, the Danish play effectively – and endlessly – conveyed the unobserved misery of the industrial proletariat. *The Freud Project*, no doubt, was about the essential emptiness –



Within a little more than a fortnight of its publication, Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* was presented at the Royal Theatre, Copenhagen. When Danish actress Fru Hennings, pictured here, closed the door on the Helmer household, its reverberations were heard around the world.

style over substance – of the Victorian era, which, some say, includes us. Ric Knowles, no fan of such “modernism,” would likely argue that plays like this share “a peculiarly modernist form of closure, in which form is

but a structuralist end in itself.”<sup>20</sup> Other poststructuralists would no doubt argue the opposite, that such plays, by resisting a comforting narrative, resist simple closure.

The question is, if naturalism is “a style of theatre in which the stage setting, the dialogue of the characters and the performance of the actors seem ‘life-like,’” in combination with a story, how do we describe *Dry Lips*? If we deny its naturalism, as most critics would, do we really want to leave it in the same category as *The Freud Project* and the Danish play?

When artists and critics disparage naturalism, what they have in mind is, as Gascoigne says, “that hoariest of Aunt Sallies, the well-made play,” by which they mean Ibsen and his imitators. But naturalism has changed. All of the early naturalists proceeded chronologically; today’s audiences easily handle flashbacks. The early plays were performed on detailed sets; today’s designers put a chair here, a table

there, a window frame to the side, to indicate place (designers get to experiment and theatres save money), and audiences have little trouble adapting. A narrator would have been unthinkable to Ibsen or Chekhov, but contemporary writers use narrators with abandon, unaware that this was, for Brecht, a key component of an attack on naturalism. Brecht went out of his way to expose lighting instruments to remind audiences they were in the theatre; now, no one cares.

Naturalism, then, has been expanded and stretched, sometimes the result of financial constraint, often the result of experimentation in and seepage from consciously anti-naturalist theatre, always de-

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pendent on the intelligent use of convention and its acceptance by increasingly flexible audiences. Playwrights, directors and designers can now use an almost endless variety of devices borrowed from anti-naturalism without threatening the essential naturalism of their work.

In *Dry Lips*, Highway uses a vast array of non-naturalistic devices, but the play tells a story, and the characters and events are recognizable. The same can be said for the immensely successful *Angels in America, Part 1: Millennium Approaches* (1991) by U.S. playwright Tony Kushner. While the anti-naturalistic disguises of these plays no doubt contribute to their success (by getting them past academic and journalistic gatekeepers), it is their essential naturalism that is a precondition for their popularity with audiences.

(Both plays, incidentally, were presented at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, an organization not known for adventurous programming. Of eight plays in the current NAC season, two are “pre-naturalist” – Shakespeare and Molière; of the remaining six, none are naturalist in the narrow sense.)

Poststructuralism among academics and the lingering sense among almost all theatre artists (as well theatre reviewers and those working for granting agencies) that naturalism is passé or worse, inhibits serious and productive discussion of plays and playwrights. Poststructuralists quote each other and debate among themselves (though it can’t really be called a debate), and, apart from a few students brought into the fold, their analyses rarely reach a larger audience. Discussions of quality and meaning are almost entirely absent. No one is explaining the plays of Tomson Highway.

I want to end by considering George F. Walker. Walker is among the two or three most successful playwrights Canada has produced (as measured by Canadian and international productions and awards) and to my mind, by a wide margin, the best. His plays are very funny. The majority are set in the working class district of Toronto in which he grew up, and his passionate sympathy for the working class is evident, but his best plays are intensely ambiguous. One can hear the echoes of Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter in Walker’s “poetic” (i.e. rhythmic) dialogue, but he’s doing something entirely new: his particular manner of playing with naturalism has allowed him to create the most articulate ordinary working class characters in the history of theatre. And, except in his earliest plays, he’s put recognizable characters and events into a story we can follow.

Knowles, in discussing Walker’s earliest,

“modernist” plays, finds that “Walker’s characteristic irony creates a formal fissure indicative of the discomfort that Canada’s most modernist playwrights have frequently felt with the form. . . . Overall, however, the ideological work performed by these [early] plays is culturally affirmative, serving to deflect disaffection into an existential inertia.”<sup>21</sup> Knowles prefers Walker’s later plays: “*Love and Anger* [1989] productively perverts the neo-Aristotelean structures of reversal and recognition, [and] *Nothing Sacred* [1988] does something similar with the oedipal narrative.”<sup>22</sup>

Chris Johnson of the University of Manitoba does a better job of describing Walker’s work, in his *Essays on George F. Walker*. He’s hard on poststructuralism, which, he says, “has all too often. . . frozen into a rigid, heavily-codified, pseudo-scientific and impersonal discourse,”<sup>23</sup> but he can’t stop himself from using poststructuralist writers and jargon to justify his admiration for Walker. Moreover, Johnson is concerned that something was lost, circa 1997, when Walker moved from modernism towards a more accessible theatre: “Walker’s work underwent a change from the earlier eccentric, ‘ex-centric’ plays to work more accessible to a broader audience, more ‘generous’ to use Walker’s word, and arguably, then, more ‘mainstream.’”<sup>24</sup> “I think Walker was feeling the pull of commercial theatre, [but] at the same time. . . was repelled by it, and felt that that kind of theatre would separate him from his self, his artistic self.”<sup>25</sup> Johnson never says that Walker “sold out.” Rather there’s a sadness, as when Johnson writes of the “contradictions which occur when, on the one hand, Walker tries to stay true to what he sees, how he sees it, and what he is doing, and on the other hand tries to reach the broader audience.”<sup>26</sup>

There may be a conflict between an artist’s integrity and his or her desire for popular success, but there’s no contradiction. Artists *should* want to reach an audience. That Walker “rose to what passes as prominence in Canadian theatre”<sup>27</sup> may be sad because Johnson’s ironic phrasing reflects the lack of recognition for artists in Canada, but Walker’s success and willingness to be generous to an audience are cause for celebration, not sadness.

Judith Thompson is another very successful Canadian playwright, though more among academics (and perhaps theatre artists) than with audiences. According to Knowles, “There is even less sense here [in Thompson] than in Walker’s plays of a unified or essentialist view of the individual.”<sup>28</sup> This is, apparently, a point in Thompson’s favour, but it underscores the arbitrary nature of poststructuralist – or at least Knowles’ – criticism. Thompson’s work – with its closed world and the apparent impossibility of communication – is reminiscent of Pinter’s and could easily be described as absurdist.

Thompson’s modernism – or perhaps her ability to resist “a unified or essentialist view of the individual” – makes her particularly attractive to academics. This may or may not be the reason Thompson gets into *The Canadian Encyclopedia*.<sup>29</sup> In any case, Walker doesn’t. Now there’s reason for sadness. ■

## Notes

1. W.B. Worthen, ed., *The Harcourt Brace Anthology of Drama*, 2000, p. 589.
2. Worthen, p. 583.
3. Bamber Gascoigne, *Twentieth Century Drama*, Hutchinson University Library, 1965, p. 7.
4. Raymond Williams, *Drama from Ibsen to*

*Brecht*, Pelican, 1976, p. 4.

5. Robert Fulford, *The Triumph of Narrative*, Anansi, 1999, p. x.
6. Émile Zola, as quoted in Eric Bentley, *The Playwright as Thinker*, Harvest, 1967, p. 6.
7. August Strindberg, as quoted in Bentley, 1967, p. 181.
8. Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*, quoted in W.B. Worthen, ed., *Harcourt Brace Anthology of Drama*, 2000, p. 901.
9. A quotation, I am told, from Gore Vidal.
10. Gascoigne, p. 9-10. “Well-made play” actually describes an earlier form of theatre that arose in France in the mid-1800s, but is often used to describe Ibsen’s type of naturalism. Ibsen, in fact, adapted the well-made play structure for his purposes.
11. Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, University of Minnesota Press, 1998, p. 117.
12. Marshall McLuhan’s theories remain controversial, but he was talking about structures of media, not literature or drama. Sitting in front of a television set, reading a book, or watching a film in a crowded cinema are significantly different kinds of social acts.
13. Ric Knowles, *The Theatre of Form and the Production of Meaning*, ECW Press, 1999. A chapter entitled “Dialogic Monologue: A Dialogue” does present a “dialogue” (between Knowles and Jennifer Harvie), but it’s like one of those debates where everyone agrees with each other.
14. Knowles, pp. 15-16.
15. Knowles, p. 35.
16. Knowles, p. 16.
17. Knowles, p. 62. The part about the “colonizing gaze” is Knowles quoting Alan Filewod.
18. See, for example, Marie Annharte Baker, “Angry Enough to Spit, but with Dry Lips

it Hurts More than You Know,” *Canadian Theatre Review* 68 (Fall 1991).

19. This avoidance can take a number of forms. Poststructuralists, of course, look at structures. Helen Gilbert and Joanne Thompkins, in *Post-Colonial Drama* (1996, excerpted in Worthen), discuss “the body,” which, they say, “functions as one of the most charged sites of theatrical representation” (p. 1456). Referring to the crucifix/rape scene, they tell us that *Dry Lips* “refuses the power of rape by subsuming it within the mythological frameworks invoked” (p. 1462).

In his review in Maclean’s (April 29, 1991), John Bemrose finds, amazingly, that “*Dry Lips* is also a warning. [The reverse’s] predicament can be seen as being symbolic of the larger society that surrounds it – a society that may itself be bent on self-destruction in more subtle or socially acceptable ways.”

Sharon Mazer, in the Instructor’s Manual that accompanies Worthen’s anthology, writes that *Dry Lips* ends with Zachary “enacting a celebration of his family that at the same time serves as an idealization of the Native American family” (p. 152). Some of my brighter students pointed out that it seemed a lot like the nuclear family.

20. Knowles, p. 54.
21. Knowles, pp. 57-58.
22. Knowles, p. 46.
23. Chris Johnson, *Essays on George F. Walker*, Blizzard, 1999, p. 12.
24. Johnson, p. 247.
25. Johnson, p. 244.
26. Johnson, p. 228.
27. Johnson, p. 247.
28. Knowles, p. 50.
29. James H. Marsh, editor, McClelland & Stewart, 1999.

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