Are We There Yet?
Gay Representation in Contemporary Canadian Drama

by

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ABSTRACT

ARE WE THERE YET? REPRESENTATIONS OF GAY MEN IN CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN THEATRE

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This study acknowledges that historical antipathies towards gay men have marginalised their theatrical representation in the past. However, over the last century a change has occurred in the social location of gay men in Canada (from being marginalised to being included). Given these changes, questions arise as to whether staged representations of gay men are still marginalised today. Given antipathies towards homosexuality and homophobia may contribute to the how theatres determine the riskiness of productions, my investigation sought a correlation between financial risk in theatrical production and the marginalisation of gay representations on stage. Furthermore, given that gay sex itself, and its representation on stage, have been theorised as loci of antipathies to gayness, I investigate the relationship between the visibility and overtness of gay sex in a given play and the production of that play’s proximity to the mainstream.

The study located four plays from across the spectrum of production conditions (from high to low financial risk) in BC. Analysis of these four plays shows general trends, not only in the plays’ constructions but also in the material conditions of their productions that indicate that gay representations become more overt, visible and sexually explicit when less financial risk was at stake. Various factors are identified –
including the development of the script, the producing theatre, venue, and promotion of
the production – that shape gay representation. The analysis reveals that historical
theatrical practices, that have had the effect of marginalizing the representations of gays in
the past, are still in place. These practices appear more prevalent the higher the financial
risk of the production.
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Chapter One: Contexts of Contemporary Canadian Gay Plays

Representations of homosexual men have appeared in English-language theatre for more than a century. At times, they have been presented as characters whose sexuality is an overt and integral part of their identity. Yet they have also appeared as characters where their sexuality is less visible and must be inferred through a variety of codes. Various scholars consider these variations in gay representation to be related to the shifts in the social location of gay men that have occurred over time (Sinfield, Out 2; Clum, Acting xv). As the social location of gay men in Canada has changed, this thesis asks if the contemporary representation of homosexuality on our stages reflects those changes.

Until the mid-twentieth century homosexual men in Canada were pathologised in medicine, criminalised in law, and marginalised in social standing. However, after a variety of social changes here, homosexual men mainly are regarded as equal citizens to heterosexual men; this equality is now mostly enshrined in various legislations and cultural practices. However, social change often occurs asymmetrically. Social policies often need to be created to reflect new understandings as they come to light. Yet these policies do not immediately translate into cultural practices, nor are they equally embraced by the various demographics of Canadians. Thus some areas of Canadian society, including the arts, may still maintain practices which reflect the formerly marginalised social location of gay men.

In contemporary Canadian theatre, representations of gay men appear across a wide span of conditions of production. This visible presence can be considered a reflection of the changes that have progressively occurred over time in regards to gay men’s inclusion and equality in Canadian society. However, the theatre industry, through a variety of practices, has a long history of marginalising or obscuring overtly gay representations on its stages.
These seemingly contrary positions prompt a number of questions. Have the changes in our social policies (those affecting gay men in Canada) been translated uniformly into the ways in which gay men are represented on our stages? Or, given that social change often occurs asymmetrically, and that theatre practices may be both conservative and progressive, do these opposing practices make for a set of contrasting representations of gay men on our stages? I propose that contemporary theatre creates a broad set of staged expressions of gay men to accommodate both the progressive and conservative traditions of theatre. I contend that representations of gay men vary, according to the conditions of their theatrical production and reception, across a continuum where the sexual aspects of gay male characters are more overt and explicit on the fringes of theatrical production.

Gay men have been historically marginalised on English-language stages. Alan Sinfield writes that prior to the 1970s, gay theatrical representations were often only able to be “gleaned in the margins of mainstream plays” (Sinfield, *Out* 313). Such presences were marginalised; they were disguised, distorted or otherwise coded in their construction in order to reduce their visibility, and thereby not challenge dominant ideologies that criminalised and pathologised homosexuality. With the arrival of the 1960s, overt, undisguised, un-coded, gay representations began to challenge dominant understandings of homosexuality, but these “were situated in the margins, or fringes of theatre institutions” (Sinfield, *Out* 313). Vito Russo records a similar movement gay men’s representation in American film at the time (163). In English-language Canadian theatre today, gay representations can be found in almost all kinds of performance, from non-professional, self-funded fringe productions to mainstream, high-budget, commercial productions. Given this presence of gay characters in contemporary theatre, and the nature of theatre practice
can be both progressive and conservative, questions arise as to how gay expressions are now shown on these stages. Do some gay expressions, when seen in mainstream productions, predominantly appear in particular ways, as was the case in the earlier half of the last century? Are social values concerning homosexuality challenged in some modes of production more than others, as occurred in the sixties?

How gay men are represented in popular media, including theatre, can be considered an important aspect of the progression towards gay inclusion in contemporary life, as audiences viewing gay representations may gain awareness and understandings of gay life, and thus may shift or reaffirm their views concerning homosexuality (Sinfield, *Out 1*). Theatre thus has the potential to affect public perceptions of gay men. As sexuality is an inherent, and perhaps defining characteristic of many gay men’s identities, the staged expression of their sexuality may be important in terms of whether fully-drawn gay characters are seen on our contemporary stages.

Staging gay sex and gay desire is a means of gaining visibility for gay men. One of the ways that expressions of gay men were historically marginalised in theatre was by making expressions of desire between men less visible, or invisible to certain sectors of an audience. Gay men can be represented through a variety of means. Cultural cues, declarations of identity, or dramatic narrative are but a few ways an audience may learn a character is gay. However, if a character is not shown to be actively engaged sexually, does this mean that part of their character is being rendered invisible? I propose this question because the visibility of gay sexuality has long been a concern of those promoting gay equality. Joan Scott writes about its importance when discussing visible indications of gay
desire: “it is the possibility that they [sites where gay sex occurs] can be seen that threatens order and ultimately overcomes repression” (778).

Furthermore, expressions of sexuality create meanings on stage. John Clum focuses specifically on how expressions of gay desire affect audiences. He asserts that

. . . [while] sexual desire is not the only dimension to homosexual experience
. . . [i]t is sexual desire and acting upon that desire that puts the homosexual into conflict with dominant power structures . . . . Everyone knows that sex between men happens, but the sight of two men kissing is often seen as a transgression of the gender order, taken by many to be “natural” . . . . A kiss, to paraphrase the old song, isn’t just a kiss. Hence its theatrical power.

(Clum, Acting 11)

Additionally, gay sexuality itself contributes to what has been labeled the “ick factor” (Erbentraut 1). Martha Nussbaum finds certain persons hold antipathies towards homosexuality and they “maintain their beliefs largely due to an underlying, subconscious feeling of disgust at the thought of what defines ‘gay’ as . . . what is done in the bedroom”, or sexuality itself (Erbentraut 1). In her book From Disgust to Humanity, she states “there is no doubt that the body of the gay man has been a central locus of disgust-anxiety . . .” (Nussbaum 18). This disgust circulates with ideas of penetrability, bodily fluids and, as she describes, an ability to “ooze” and be “contaminated” (19). She extends her argument to consider further ideas of contamination through gaze and proximity as well (19). This “projective disgust”, where no rational threat is derived from the object one is disgusted by, is a “common way of stigmatising [subordinate groups]” (20).
Given the potency that Clum finds in staging “sexual desire and acting upon that desire”, and the disgust Nussbaum claims that some persons feel about gay sexuality, my project refines the proposition with a specific focus on sexually active gay characters. Are staged expressions of sexually engaged homosexual men related to a particular place of production? Are there places where disgust of some audience members towards such expressions may dictate how gayness is expressed there? Are gay characters’ sexualities contextualised in ways that may increase or decrease audience disgust or antipathy? Do meanings derived from a character’s sexuality relate to the conditions of production of the play? Moreover, given the history of criminalising and pathologising same-sex attraction between men, how important is it now to represent homosexuals as being actively engaged sexually? Do representations of sexually engaged gay men create specific meanings? If so, are such meanings not generated by representations of gay men who are not sexually engaged? Is it politically important to represent gay men as sexually active or with sexual agency?

This study is a preliminary investigation of these questions. It notes a correlation between the material conditions of performance and the representations of homosexuality, and offers understandings as to how and why these correlations may exist, rather than claiming any prescriptive cause and effect. I examine the sexual component of gay expressions in four gay plays that span conditions of production in one theatre market (south-western BC) over a period of seven years (2001-2007). These plays are Daniel MacIvor’s His Greatness, Michael Lewis MacLennan’s The Shooting Stage, Conrad Alexandrowicz’s Beggars Would Ride, and Chris Grignard’s Orchard Drive. These plays were chosen through a number of criteria. They are considered gay plays because they
express sexual desire between men. They were selected because of the availability of material related to their productions, including: scripts, advertising, reviews, and designs, among others. Furthermore, the plays were selected to represent a wide set of conditions created by the location of their production: from the minimal conditions found in a conservative area in the interior, to opulent features of a tourist area, to the “national disgrace” of Vancouver’s downtown east side (Cameron).

It is important to understand what is meant by the term “gay play.” I arrived at criteria for selecting what constitutes a "gay play" by using ideas from Clum, Heinze, Sinfield, and Wallace. These scholars have considered and classified staged, gay representations in various academic volumes. Robert Wallace takes "issue with the idea of a gay play" and argues that "a gay text is problematic" as he considers texts' meanings specific to their readers or "reading communities" (Wallace, Making 20). Wallace instead chooses to define plays that he collected as plays by gay men, commenting that gay playwrights "by publicly declaring they are gay, contribute as much to the social sense of gayness as do the gay characters they create." (Wallace, Making 12-13). As my study looks at the wider, material conditions that inform how plays mean, I took these considerations into account and chose plays written by men who openly declared their identity as gay, either through their own publications or in other media.

In Out on Stage, rather than focus on playwrights, Alan Sinfield instead finds and looks at “the production and circulation of concepts and images, with the sense of the possible lives they may create" (Sinfield, Out 3). He explores staged, gay representations to examine how they "establish, consolidate and challenge notions about lesbians and gay men which were held both by them and the society at large" (4). John Clum also looks to gay
theatre history in his *Still Acting Gay: Male Homosexuality in Modern Drama*. He refers to works as "gay male drama", where "gay men see themselves and the role they play in twentieth century American and British society" (1). In his *Love, Sexuality and Identity: The Gay Experience in Contemporary Canadian Drama*, Michael Heinze uses a description of gay theatre that looks to how it functions in performance. Using ideas similar to those of Clum and Sinfield, he believes "gay subject matter . . . contributes to the ongoing definition of what gayness actually is and what it means to be gay" (Heinze 16). These considerations allowed me a wide scope through which to consider plays for this study. However, I wanted to look for plays with a focus on gay sex. Gay sex not only appears to be the core of various definitions of homosexuality, but also seems to lie at the root of much of the resistance to gay equality. Clum claims "sexual desire is not the only dimension to the homosexual experience but it is at the core of that experience" (Clum, *Still* 13). His discussion of the threat of staged gay sexuality or "embodied homosexuality . . . that puts the homosexual into conflict with dominant power structures" suggests acts of desire between men are perhaps un-assimilable by the certain audiences (13). I selected plays using this idea; "gay plays" are those where there are indications or enactments of male-male desire.

This chapter will outline various contexts which inform this study. It begins with a brief history of gay men in Canada. I then map a history of gay representation in English-language theatre, charting how its meanings have historically reflected both dominant and marginal understandings of gay men. After this, I expand on what is meant by mainstream and fringe theatre, and how these sites of performance offer differing conditions that may affect the meaning of staged gay representations. I then consider how meaning is created in theatre productions through the idea of the "entire theatre experience" and discuss how
investigating this experience is apt for studying gay theatre where meanings are generated on many levels (Carlson, xiii). In the subsequent chapters, I examine each of the plays which I have selected in detail, looking first to how characters’ gay sexuality is portrayed in the play’s text, and then to how that sexuality means in terms of the text’s performance and the “entire theatre experience”. In the concluding chapter I consider the consequences and meanings that derive from having the gay men’s sexuality overt in some forms of theatre yet less evident in others forms.

**Gay Social Location in Canada**

Canadian theatre's relation to social change has been well analysed in academic works and scholarship (Ryga 350; Filewod, “National” 425-426; Knowles, *Reading 10*). These analyses discuss the relationship between the social changes that may occur in a particular theatrical and cultural milieu and how the meanings produced through theatrical performance may reflect these changes. Given this interplay between social change and theatre, it is valuable to sketch out Canada’s history in terms of how homosexuality has been perceived and the place of gay men in Canadian society. This history is also useful in locating the antipathies towards same-sex behaviour that inform society in a given moment, and thus the reflections of those antipathies in arts and culture. It is of further use in giving historical contexts to the ways through which gay men are still currently socially marginalised and how this marginalisation has come to be.

As determined by complex and dynamic legal, moral, cultural and scientific understandings, the social location of homosexual men in Canada underwent great changes over the course of the country’s history. These changes often occurred asymmetrically as they reflected shifts in various ideologies, institutions, and demographics. Thus it is
difficult to create a generalised depiction of gay male life in any particular era. Even in contemporary Canada, our pluralistic society (where multiple and contrasting ideas regularly enter into, and compete for dominance in public consciousness and in various institutions) allows that understandings of gay men may radically differ across various sectors of society at any given point. Yet it is possible to develop some measure of gay men’s social location over time by examining both the various institutional and cultural proscriptions against male-male sexual behaviour, the historical indications of spaces where that behaviour occurred, and the social identity (and later community) that arose from men who engaged in that behaviour.

Same sex desire has been feature of human history since antiquity. Its social location has varied from being an accepted facet of life, to its expression being punishable by death (Halperin, Hundred 55; Crompton 198). Since colonial invasion, laws have prohibited male-male sexual behaviours in what is now Canada. Until 1859 sodomy was prohibited as a law derived from the 1533 act of English Parliament, and carried with it a maximum penalty of hanging (Fone 216). In 1859, this law was replaced by the buggery law in the Consolidated Statutes of Canada, while retaining the maximum penalty of hanging for another decade (“Consolidated” 956). In 1892, gross indecency was added to the criminal code to criminalise male same-sex behaviours other than buggery (113). Yet despite these laws, there is evidence that in some isolated men’s environments, including work camps or bunkhouses, same-sex behaviours were a “socially-tolerated and accepted fact of life” (Chapman, “Sex” 10). While acts of homosexual sex always carried a risk that charges could be brought, in these communities “the act was not considered either deviant or criminal” (Chapman, “Sexual” 15).
Late in the nineteenth century, identity became an issue in the understandings of same-sex desire. Concerns shifted from considering same-sex desire as a taboo behaviour, to being associated with a particular type of person. Understandings of inversion began to consider such desires as part of a “new taxonomy” of character that took into account ideas of masculinity, anatomical sex and psychology (Halperin, *Hundred* 16). Same-sex behaviours began to be examined in medicine, psychology and academic work. In 1895, Krafft–Ebing coined the term “homosexual” in his medical writings, to define a kind of identity type associated with these behaviours (Sinfield, *Wilde* 110). With homosexuality discussed in academic discourses, material became available to the educated public offering insights into the formation of homosexual identities. This era saw social purity movements forming to denounce same-sex behaviours. These movements “advocated the prohibition of all non-matrimonial and non-reproductive sex” (Kinsman 117). Furthermore “[t]he Wilde scandal in particular was a vital moment in the creation of a male homosexual identity” (Plummer, *Making* 85).

The publicity surrounding Oscar Wilde’s trials allowed for an identity construction of the “homosexual” to enter public discourse, where it was pathologised physically, behaviourally and criminally. Wilde’s trial allowed a public imagination to consolidate how a homosexual looks and acts. This facet of gay history is of particular importance as identity formations arising from Wilde’s trials are still very much in circulation today in both our theatre and in broader society in general. This identity was marked by Wilde’s physical and social traits, including effeteness, effeminacy, conspicuous idleness, opulent clothing and fashionable manners, and an obsession with aesthetics, among others (Sinfield, *Out* 32). The traits of character, which ascribed to Wilde in the accounts of his trials, ran
counter to circulating ideologies concerning middle-class masculinity. These traits threatened normative notions of family, industry, and by extension, nation. For example, Sinfield describes an aspect of the era’s masculinity: “. . . since manliness is celebrated as the proper inspiration, validation and necessary condition of trade and manufacturing . . . art takes, in counterpart, a feminine role” (Sinfield, Wilde 86). In this example, the era’s construction of masculinity excludes Wilde’s type due to both his aestheticism and idleness.

Wilde’s characteristics offered a model through which society purportedly could identify the homosexual. Having identifiable characteristics ascribed to the new category of the homosexual was important as, unlike other marginalised sectors of society, such as women or persons of colour, homosexuals could be invisible. This need to identify homosexuals, and the use of the Wildean model to do so, remains in some aspects of society for the following century. I discuss the use of the Wildean model to identify homosexual presences throughout theatre practice in the next section. This identity allowed a sanctioned vilification of homosexuals which, in turn, helped to police their public presence. This Wildean model, as an understanding of homosexuality, has had remarkable longevity. For the hundred years following Wilde’s trials, these ideas would continue at times to affect the social location of homosexual men in Canada.

While the Wilde model was marked as belonging to the wealthy classes, his trial also introduced notions of cross-class homosexual relations between middle-class men and male prostitutes, often bell-hops or other working-class youth. C.S. Clark notes in his 1897 work, Of Toronto the Good, that homosexual prostitution was well-established in Canada at the time (89). Kinsman suggests such practices maintained a low public visibility, and did not seem to encounter much police suppression (127). However, police records of the era
also indicate same sex activity among working class Canadian men as new “social spaces opened up with urbanisation and industrial capitalism” (Kinsman 127). Such spaces could be public, private, indoors or out; although working class men usually were housed in ways that restricted access to “private or intimate spaces” of their own (127). As a result of this restriction public parks, bath houses and lavatories were often chosen as places for sex. Due to the visibility of some of these spaces, authorities attempted to control such spaces and contain homosexuality through surveillance and policing. However, some of these operations were considered to have had the opposite effect, as “through this policing . . . a certain popular consciousness regarding the existence of homosexuality was created . . .” (Maynard 238).

The Great War created numerous spaces for same-sex activities as men were often taken great distances from their families and housed in male-only spaces for the duration. Problems requiring policing of both same-sex erotic interaction and female prostitution arose when large concentrations of male recruits trained in major Canadian population centres (Kinsman 133). While induction screening was meant to prevent “gender invert[s]” from entering the ranks, it may have unintentionally created avenues for early homosexual networks by labelling and then “cutting some homosexual men out of ‘normal’ social interaction . . .”; in essence these actions may have formed for them a network of like-minded persons (125).

In the years between the wars the new media of radio and film began to reflect state social policies and modern ideals of nuclear family life, featuring narratives of institutionalised heterosexuality. Mass consumer culture produced images that mostly denied the existence of homosexuals. George Chauncey describes how, after the depression
hit, there came a “powerful campaign to exclude [gay men] from the public sphere” in popular media (Chauncey 331). After 1934, Canadian film-goers could not see overt depictions of homosexuality in American film as these were banned by the American Motion Picture Production (or Hays) Code (Russo 31). However, American films found ways to code and disguise homosexuality to pass censors. The most common of these codings was the “sissy” or man of a “failed masculinity” (Russo 33). These depictions recall the Wildean model, and underscored an understanding of homosexuals as effeminate, gender inverts who took on particular aspects of the gendered behaviours of women. This availability of gay presences in this era is of importance as it indicates that regardless of how gay characterisations were marginalised or coded, they nevertheless continued to occur throughout various media. This appears to indicate some intentions among media artists to make gay presences available to some audience members.

The onset of World War Two and its massive mobilisation of men allowed for a variety of ideas considering homosexuality to come together. In Paul Jackson’s book, *One of the Boys*, the author discusses how, in military administrations, a broad range of understanding of homosexuality began to be considered. These included: ideas of immorality; varying notions of psychiatry and disease; and in some cases, considerations of homosexuality as an inborn and natural condition. Jackson’s work examines how various military courts martial, disciplinary protocols, and medical branches all wrestled with varying understandings of homosexuality among the ranks. At times homosexuality was overlooked, re-evaluated as a condition of circumstances, or prosecuted to the fullest degree (which could involve being discharged with ignominy, military prison, and a denial of future employment, pay, and financial opportunities) (63). Most notably, Jackson draws
focus on homosexuality’s transition in some authorities’ perceptions from being considered a moral failing to being a medical condition. Jackson also notes how military conditions of the war created spaces for men to discover and explore homosexuality and non-heteronormative behaviours (such as drag in garrison performances), spaces that for many of them were unavailable in their hometowns in Canada (148). His work also gives insight into public perceptions of homosexuals which were predominantly seen in terms of their gender unorthodoxy or inversion. This perception of homosexuals as “fairies and queens” was the stereotype in the “popular consciousness” (220). Jackson further finds a division between military administration’s reactions to homosexuality and those found among the ranks; he finds a level of acceptance and protection for homosexuals within their units. The disparity between administration’s and the ranks’ opinions about homosexuality is of interest as it may foretell of the gradual change in Canadian attitudes towards homosexuality that would later occur (264). The disparity also forecasts how differing classes and sections of Canadian society will, at times later, maintain opposing views on homosexuality.

In the generation following the war, Canada saw a reconstruction of “heterosexual hegemony . . . in response to social changes . . . building on, and transforming previous forms of heterosexism” (Kinsman 157). This was seen through a media saturation of normalising images of the heterosexual families and the return of women and men to their pre-war roles in the labour force. While this trend left little room for alternative sexualities or ways of living, the social place of homosexuality continued to shift. A number of factors altered the location of homosexuals in public consciousness in this era. The first Kinsey report, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, shifted definitions of who was a homosexual
from a binary understanding to a gradient scale and introduced ideas of latency into the mix. Kinsey’s work also disrupted notions of gender inversion as a defining signifier of a homosexual. Less than a decade after Kinsey’s publication, *The Report of the Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution* (better known as the Wolfenden Report) attempted to look at homosexuality as a social problem in Great Britain. Spurred on by the Montague trial in 1955, the British Home Secretary set out to study homosexuality as a social condition, ignoring “the question of sin” and setting aside medical interpretations (Sinfield, *Out* 237). Initially investigated with prostitution, the report’s original intents were to find more effective means of regulating sexual deviance (Kinsman 213). The main proposal for reform in the Wolfenden Report “was to locate homosexual practices in the private realm” where, regardless of their moral standing, they would not require the law’s attention (Sinfield, *Out* 238). In practical terms it proposed that, for certain males over a particular age, having consensual sex with each other would not actually be illegal. While the report’s recommendations did not address the inequalities that homosexuals faced daily, it did actually allow some men a space to engage in their preferred form of sexuality without being criminals. The report took another ten years to be acted upon in the British parliament; however it provided a “strategic framework” for Canadian criminal code reform in the sixties (Kinsman 263).

In the fifties, Maurice Leznoff was able to infiltrate and identify a number of established social networks of homosexual men in urban Canada. He found overt social organisations amongst men who could afford some visibility through the nature of their employment (often self-employed) along with covert groups for men with more professional employment. His findings indicated a growing form of social organisation that
included meeting places, networks to warn about police, and complex social hierarchies (Leznoff 31-40).

This era also saw conservative trends reforming pre-war notions that associated homosexuality with national degeneration into new threats of “national, social and criminal sexual danger” (Kinsman 157). Sprung from these ideas came various witch hunts that aimed to purge government and military departments of homosexuals (174). As an example of these dangers, the notion of the homosexual as child molester became promoted in this era (“Boys”). Criminalisation of male-male sex was refined in the rewriting of the Criminal Code in 1953, which was to eventually include “dangerous sexual offender” provisions. These additions to the Code could determine offenders as a specific type of person, unable to control their urges, and thus requiring more restrictive punishments (Kinsman 183). Furthermore, the 1952 Canadian Immigration Act considered homosexuals as “subversives” (Girard 10). This consideration was used to police new Canadians’ entry in the country (10).

The social location of gay men in Canada continued to change in the sixties. This decade brought socio-sexual upheavals around the western world as the sexual revolution and various counter-culture movements developed. In 1964 a political awareness group initially comprised of gay men, the Association for Social Knowledge, or ASK, was formed in Vancouver (“Canadian Lesbian”, 1964). Its mandate was to sponsor and disseminate research about possible causes of homosexuality, to help with both homosexuals’ and greater society’s adjustment to each other, and to reform laws concerning homosexuality (Kinsman 231). On New Year’s 1966, ASK opened a gay space for its members, providing a place for meetings, dances, a library, newsletter production and counselling services. ASK
regularly debated and confronted ideas about whether homosexuality was an actual sickness, and consequently, whether a “cure” was a possible (Kinsman 237). ASK and other homophile organisations met with other social groups, including numerous church associations, and were influential in changing attitudes towards legal reforms (Kinsman 240). ASK’s public awareness campaigns were published alongside other media which challenged the status and criminalisation of homosexuals. Magazines such as Two and Gay spoke directly from a gay point of view whereas a wave of publicity in mainstream print, such as Maclean’s, The Toronto Telegram and Chatelaine began discussing the issue in a progressive manner (Freeman 820; Jackson 226).

The last years of the sixties culminated in a variety of changes for Canadian gay men. These changes were precipitated by both the circulating awareness of the Wolfenden Report (and its implementation in the UK in 1967), and the Klippert case in Canada (CBC, “1967”). Everett Klippert was a man convicted of gross indecency for having consensual sex with other men. In 1966, after his second conviction he was “pronounced a dangerous sexual offender” and given an indefinite sentence of preventative detention (Kinsman 260). His lawyer appealed the case, citing dubious testimony from psychiatrists asserting that he would fail “to control his sexual impulses” (260). An inability to show Klippert as an actual danger to society exposed the dangerous offender system as inherently problematic. The system reasoned that homosexuals are likely to have gay sex and, by the protocols of the criminal code and by this behaviour alone, would be considered “dangerous” (Kinsman 261). The appeal of the case to the Supreme Court in 1967 mobilised media and informed many Canadians as to the possibility that any Canadian homosexual could be indefinitely incarcerated for having private, consensual sex (261). The loss of the appeal showed the
Canadian system to be directly in conflict with the ideas proposed by the Wolfenden Report. The resulting controversy spurred parliament to act. Justice Minister Pierre Trudeau subsequently put forth the first version of the sexual offences reform bill in December of 1967 (CBC, “Same”). When enacted as part of bill C-150 in 1969, it removed gross indecency and buggery from being crimes when conducted in private between two consenting adults over age twenty-one (McLeod, 1969 44). This development was only months before the Stonewall riots in New York City. The coverage of the riots in the press further introduced gay subcultures into public consciousness as visible and newsworthy presences.

While the new laws provided some fundamental protections against being arrested for certain kinds of consensual sex, in the seventies gay men in Canada could still be fired from work, fail to gain government clearance in civil service, lose their domicile, lose custody of children, or have their sexual activities far more scrutinised than those of heterosexuals. Homophile and gay liberation groups, perhaps bolstered by the changes brought by Trudeau’s bill, began to form across Canada to challenge the situation (Tom Warner 59, 66; “Canadian Lesbian” 1964 – 1969, 1970 – 1979). These groups began to organise marches and demonstrations in major population centres (Tom Warner 66 -77). The gay liberation movement gathered, promoted and disseminated information about homosexuality and developments in law reform, and community building. Access to information concerning these ideas allowed for gay persons to form their own identities. In some cases this allowed some men’s identities to be both publically expressed and also to refute the various social constructions that had previously defined them (D’Emilio, Capitalism 106-108). Furthermore some gay men reappropriated the tools of oppression
and social constructions that had been used to marginalise them. This is seen most clearly in the Wildean model, where some men were able to capitalise on an aestheticism that was assumed a part of their homosexuality. This allowed gay men to take pride in their work in roles that historically had been considered effeminate.

Gay spaces expanded throughout Canada as gay businesses began creating their own communities and more gay bars and baths became established, often forming gay ghettos in various cities (Kinsman 294). In 1972 The American Psychiatric Association de-listed homosexuality as a mental illness. This action added to circulating notions that were shifting most medical understandings of homosexuality to the idea of a sexual orientation, as opposed to an inversion, disease, or condition requiring treatment. These understandings, considered with gay activism, and the growing presence of gay culture as established in visible gay spaces, contributed to a long process of civil rights victories that has resulted in Canadian gay men today having most of the same rights and privileges as do heterosexual men. As early as 1975 various cities added sexual orientation to their civil charters (“Canadian Lesbian”, 1976). By 1980, various institutions, such as CUPE and Toronto School Board, protected the civil rights of gays and lesbians in their organisations (“Canadian Lesbian”, 1979, 1980).

Accordingly, Canada’s laws have gone through a variety of incremental changes since the seventies. Quebec added sexual orientation to its Charter of Human Rights in 1977, and Ontario followed in 1986 (all other provinces effectively did the same when the courts forced Alberta to read in “sexual orientation” in 1997) (“Canadian Lesbian”, 1977; CBC, “Same”; Tom Warner 211). In 1978 Canadian immigration law changed to allow homosexuals entry into the country (Tom Warner 142). In 1987 unequal age of consent
laws were altered to allow consenting men over age eighteen to have anal sex in private. Males over 14 could engage in same sex behaviours but not anal sex, nor with persons in a position of authority or influence (Smith 161). This law would eventually be struck down as unconstitutional (as discriminatory in terms of both age and sexual orientation) in 1995 (Smith 161). In 1988 gross indecency laws were also repealed (Tom Warner 287). In 1992 the Canadian military lifted its ban of homosexual soldiers (CBC, “Same”). In 1997 Delwin Vriend took the Alberta Government to the Supreme Court of Canada to address anti-gay discrimination (CBC, “Same”). His case determined that all provinces must, in their human rights legislation, bar discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation (CBC, “Same”).

In 1995 gay couples won recognition of old-age spousal benefits and the ability to adopt their partners’ children. That same year the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that "sexual orientation" should be “read in” to Section 15 of the charter (CBC, “Same”; Egan 1). In 1996, sexual orientation was added to the Canadian Human Rights Act – an anti-discrimination law that applies to federally regulated activities throughout Canada (CHRC). In 1999, the M v H decision declared that Ontario’s Family Law Act, and their definition of spouse, are discriminatory. There were a number of reactions to this ruling. Ontario rewrote its laws to include with the word “spouse” the words “same-sex partner” in all legislation. The legislation did not include the term “marriage” for same-sex partners, as defining marriage is set by federal law. Ottawa followed the next year with Bill C-23 to include same sex partners as equals in terms of social and tax benefits (CBC, “Same”). By 2002 the Ontario Superior Court (in Halpern v. Canada) ruled that prohibiting gay couples from marrying is unconstitutional. This decision was then stayed for two years. The stay was appealed and by summer 2003 legally recognised gay marriages were performed there
(Halpern v Canada). Several other provinces followed suit until 2005 when the federal government passed bill C-38 allowing for same-sex marriage across the country (CBC, “Same”). In 2005 Conservative Party leader and leader of the opposition Stephen Harper went on record as being against same sex marriage, stating that his beliefs in the matter reflect “real Canadian values” (“Stephen”). In December 2006, the Conservatives (led by Harper) attempted to repeal the bill; they failed (CBC, “Same”). Harper subsequently stated he considered the matter closed.

While gays were gaining legal equality, various institutions reacted by trying to maintain control of homosexual expression in Canada. For example, throughout the seventies, eighties, and nineties authorities raided bathhouses across Canada, usually charging owners under bawdy-house laws and clients as “found ins” (CBC, “Same”; “Canadian Lesbian”, What; “Canadian Lesbian”, 1970-1982). In the seventies such raids were often in collusion with local media, and “sensational media reports” shamed found-ins and at times claimed bathhouses had associations with crime, paedophilia, prostitution and drugs (Tom Warner 104). Bathhouse raids were used in an attempt to “clean up” Montreal prior to the Olympic Games in 1976 (107). Warner believes that raids in this era were also an attempt to “recriminalize” gays and “turn public opinion against legislating equality” (107). The 1981 Toronto raids were denounced for their suspension of gay men’s civil rights and “as evoking memories of Nazi Germany” (Makin). These raids, in particular, were notable for the violence and physical abuse committed by police (Tom Warner 110). The response to the raids included protests and mobilization of political forces for reform. The public’s reactions to the raids are considered to have “prevented even bigger acts of state repression” (Tom Warner 113). When the Bijou Porn Bar in Toronto was raided in
1999, community reaction occurred quickly, monitoring police actions, developing community response and lobbying for changes in legislation. When charges were subsequently dropped, the activism the raid had inspired was met with considerable backlash, from straights and from conservative gays (Tom Warner 299).

Authorities also charged bookstores (due to their sales and importation of gay themed literature) and publications (such as The Body Politic) under a variety of laws, all of which tended to thwart the dissemination of information concerning homosexual themes (“Canadian Lesbian”, What; “Canadian Lesbian”, 1970-1982; CBC, “Same”: Tom Warner 109). Many of these reactions tended to increase awareness among the public about the predicament of gay persons in Canada, as well as spur political momentum towards changing laws. In 1985 the Parliamentary Committee on Equal Rights wrote that it was “shocked by the high level of discriminatory treatment of homosexuals in Canada. The report discusse[d] the harassment, violence, physical abuse, psychological oppression and hate propaganda that homosexuals live with” (CBC, “Same”).

The onset of the AIDS crisis in the early eighties brought reactionary movements, many of which thwarted the evolution towards gay inclusion and equality under the law. An “AIDS panic” was noted where AIDS and HIV+ patients were denied housing, schooling and some gay men presumed they would see an erosion of their civil rights (New York). “Confronting such problems as violence, discrimination and minimal government support the gay community [in Canada] united with the sense that if they did not help themselves, nobody else would (Leber). In response to the outbreak, gay and lesbian communities formed political action groups such as ACT UP and Queer Nation. While both these groups began in the United States, Canadian chapters were founded and performed political actions
in larger cities here (Smith 26). These groups promoted political discourse concerning
alternate sexualities, but the epidemic also re-emphasised metaphors of sickness and disease
into circulating understandings of homosexuality. In 1995 highly active antiretroviral
therapy (HAART), or the AIDS “cocktail” was introduced in Canada. This combination of
drugs led to a drop in mortality amongst HIV patients, with the result that HIV was
perceived as a chronic condition and no longer a “death sentence” (Hogg “Modeling”). This
development was to alter, but not totally eliminate, stigmas associating disease with gay
men.

Today, most Canadians perceive gay men as an accepted part of the social fabric of
Canada (Angus Reid). However there are moments which indicate that various factions still
attempt to marginalise gay lives and expressions. While today the Toronto Pride Festival
draws over a million people each year, the Harper government retracted funding for it in
2010 (Hall 1). Gay men are, in effect, banned from donating blood in Canada. If men who
have sex with men (MSMs) have had sex once with a man since 1977 their blood is refused
for transfusion (“Blood”). This regulation, by assuming a failure of health-care precautions
in all MSMs, discriminates against them as these restrictions are not applied to other
groups. Moreover, the practice underscores the notion of disease being associated with gay
men. Britain’s Advisory Committee on the Safety of Blood recently determined that their
similar ban had little actual effect on the safety of blood (“Blood”). The policy’s
discrimination of MSMs in Canada has spawned a lawsuit challenging this policy in 2011
(Salerno). This court action has finally prompted Canadian Blood Services (which
maintains the ban) to reconsider their policy, however at the time of this writing, they have
not changed it (Salerno). The practice of this policy, still being implemented more than a
decade after sexual orientation was read into the Charter of Rights as a barred grounds for
discrimination, indicates not only a slow pace through which human rights challenges
proceed in this country, but also difficulties in altering deeply ingrained understandings
about gay men. While this policy has a long legacy rooted in the AIDS crisis, it should be
noted that such controls over gay citizens are still being legislated. The Harper
government's legislation banning organ donations by gay men in 2008 can be seen as
similar example of unfounded discrimination against gays and a restriction on their
inclusion and participation in society (Bryden 1).

These reactions are not found solely in government. Surveys across Canada also
show a minority of Canadian citizens still maintains an antipathy towards non-heterosexual
sexualities, and these antipathies vary by the respondents’ region, income, faith, and age
(Angus-Reid). Furthermore secular and religious groups have attempted to silence gay
youth and the presence of homosexuality in school systems across Canada (Houston,
“Rainbows”; Galashan).

To summarise, the current social location of Canadian gay men is complicated.
While gay factions can be found in numerous social and governmental institutions, the
Harper government has cut funding to Toronto Pride, one of the largest social gatherings in
Canada, and one that celebrates gay inclusion in those institutions. Whereas gay men have
strong subcultural communities in cities across Canada, gay youth remain dangerously
marginalised in some urban and most rural settings (Poon). While various provincial
governments have moved to address homophobic bullying in schools, gay youth are
victimised to the point where their suicide rate is up to seven times the rate for heterosexual
youth (Bontempo 364; Gibson 110). While gay men have almost all the rights and
privileges as do heterosexual men, successive moves by the Harper government suggest that the progression of rights attained over the last thirty years is at a stand-still, or is regressing. Furthermore, under Harper, access to the courts has been severely restricted for those wishing to contest a lack of equal rights (McKay et al.). Authorities from several branches of government have been accused of homophobic civil rights abuses during the 2010 Toronto meeting of the G-20 summit (Yang). While medical authorities appear to have consensus that homosexuality is not a disease, certain religious authorities still espouse that homosexuals are “intrinsically disordered” (“Chastity”). Thus in Canada the social location of gay men is influenced and constructed by some progressive and some conservative factions of society. Where most social policies have progressed towards equality and inclusion, various institutional practices still marginalise homosexuality.

**Gay Theatre History**

A background of gay theatre history will give context to how and where gay theatre written in English has now come to be situated in contemporary Canada. Prior to the mid-1960s, most professional theatre in English Canada produced imported works, mostly from the U.S. and the U.K. (Whittaker 217). For this reason, it is important to look at non-Canadian plays written in English to understand the history of gay representation in English language theatre up until that time. Furthermore, since the mid-sixties, some English-language Canadian theatre has incorporated the same strategies that had historically marginalised gay presences in imported theatrical works. I discuss some of more prevalent strategies that have been seen on stages in Canada.

Since the early part of the twentieth century, a common strategy used to both signal and marginalise gay presences on stage was to evoke the Wildean model. Prior to the
sixties, social, commercial, and legal constraints (such as padlock laws), required homosexuality to be invisible or at least coded; playwrights on both sides of the Atlantic were unable to create openly homosexual characters for mainstream audiences. Using aspects of the identity associated with Wilde allowed playwrights to code and indicate homosexual presences in their plays, without running afoul of various censors or offending audiences and producers. These codings allowed various members of an audience to read different presences in plays, depending on their familiarity with traits associated with Wilde. To some on the "inside" gay representations could be seen on stage; to others gay presences were invisible (Clum, *Still* 1). These codings also served to reinforce and popularise Wilde as being emblematic of homosexual identity. As such, the construct articulated with the formation of gay subcultures, formulating "the central model of pre-Stonewall queerness" (Sinfield, *Out* 32). Today, some gay subcultures eschew the model while others embrace it. Whereas the Wildean model was used historically to code homosexuals on stage (and thus partially obscure their visibility), today appropriation of the model is often used to advertise and celebrate homosexuality.

Two particular themes arise directly from Wilde’s trials that are topical to a number of plays with gay presences. The first is the characterisations of the “dandy”, an aristocrat displaying “conspicuous idleness, and immorality – the ‘feminine’ dandy manners” (Sinfield, *Out* 32). The second is the threat of scandal. These themes are related as they both involve transgressions against codes which govern property inheritance (Sinfield, *Wilde* 196). The dandy was dangerous because he despised hard work and eschewed or postponed relations leading to marriage, and thus did not contribute to perpetuating his class system through inheritance (Sinfield, *Wilde* 68-75). Scandal threatened the same
system by disturbing the ability to intermarry between families and again, to consolidate inheritance. Both these themes recur in drama into the twenties to convey and infer instances of gayness onstage (Sinfield, Wilde 36). These themes are exemplified in Somerset Maugham’s *The Circle*, and *Our Betters*.

World War I and its aftermath brought other gay presences to the stage, with plays depicting male troops kept in close quarters. Such plays displayed the affections allowed under the extremes of garrison and wartime conditions. Lines between homosocial and homosexual behaviours are occasionally blurred in a number of these works, such as Ackerley’s *Prisoners of War*, and Sherriff’s *Journey’s End*. This blurring created openings where audiences could discern gay presences (Clum, *Acting* 284; Sinfield, *Out* 87).

In the 1920s, bohemian and little theatre movements further evoked the Wildean model by portraying persons of the leisure class, and their aesthetic interests (Sinfield, *Out* 59-60; 85-89). Many of the plays of the era depict male effeminacy contextualised by men’s artistic and aesthetic pursuits. Appearing marginally, such characters are often comedic, campy figures, and maintain a stage presence from the twenties until present day. These characters form the basis for numerous dramas investigating both the causes and outcome of such effeminacy, such as in Shairp’s *The Green Bay Tree*. The source of such character’s alterity is also offered as a contagion in some of these works.

After the Second World War, both British and American theatre became more liberal in portraying homosexual characters, although the Wildean model was still predominantly used to code for gay. However, as staged depictions of homosexual men became presented in less disguised ways than they had in previous decades, value systems of the day still required that such depictions be marginalised. Their presences became coded
with character traits and narratives that supported the then current, dominant ideologies. These codings helped create and underscore audience antipathies towards homosexuals. Thus, characterisations of gay men began to appear often as one or more of what are referred to as the four Ds: that is, demented (mentally ill or challenged, psychopathic, and usually self-reviling); dangerous (having a disposition that was inherently, or pathologically criminal, especially considered dangerous to youth and the vulnerable); diseased (being socially infectious, able to recruit or pass on their condition); or doomed (fated to misery, solitude, abjection, and death) (Clum, Still ix; Dollimore, Dissidence 67, 92-4, 171, 177, 236, 240-2, 249; Dreyer 3; Shackelford 104). These theatrical codings predominantly served to reinforce social constraints and commonly held understandings and constructions of homosexuals (Kinsman 40). By portraying those that strayed from the dominant culture’s heterosexual norms in a negative light, these codings also worked to offer narrative proscriptions against being gay.

Gay desire began to be glimpsed on stage in the late 1940s. Tennessee Williams wrote eroticised, masculine characters, presented as objects of desire to his audiences’ gaze. Some of his characters did not follow the Wildean model but did portray a sense of homoerotic longing. Williams’s works often critiqued enforced conformity, and indicated severe social constraints as the source of social problems rather than individuals’ particular characteristics. Often these constraints resulted in self-oppression, usually dooming the characters to misery.

The 1950s brought new staged expressions of homosexuality. These appeared in a variety of ways, some as threats to society while others were contextualised as social problems to be solved. Witch-hunts and the policing of dissent were recurrent themes in
some gay-themed plays of the Cold War era. The Kinsey Report and various psychological constructions of homosexual latency heightened an already suspicious climate. Surveillance and suspicion feature predominantly in plays such as Inge’s *The Tiny Closet*, and Anderson’s *Tea and Sympathy*, among others. In the U.K. the Report of the Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution (or Wolfendon Report) recommendations helped create a climate through which “the problem play” developed, where homosexuality was perceived openly, but as a social problem. Such plays could be progressive, such as in Gellert’s *Quaint Honour*, where various notions of obligatory effeminacy and gay contagion were repudiated (de Jongh, *Not* 63).

In the 1960s, the stage reflected changes occurring in gay life. This was seen as a wide variety of previously unstaged gay sub-cultures began to be portrayed there. Furthermore, in the U.S. and the U.K. censorship of the stage was also reduced or eliminated (Sova 38; de Jongh, *Not* 89). Canadian laws regulating the stage were (and remain) based on interpretations of regional and federal laws. However voices from gay subcultures began to be heard on stage by the late sixties in both America and the U.K. Gay men and gay subcultures, seen in Osborne’s *A Patriot for Me*, were presented openly and undisguised, making visible long obscured presences (Clum, *Acting* 210). In 1969 the production of Mart Crowley’s *The Boys in the Band* showed that stereotypes of the aesthete, the effeminate and the self-loathing were still there, but also presented seemingly well-adjusted gay men who outwardly appeared indistinguishable from their heterosexual counterparts.
Gay Theatre in Canada

Gay Canadian theatre appears to originate in the sixties. Its development is aligned with the evolution of professional Canadian theatre, as the economic, social, and political conditions for both inform the terms of what was staged and how it produced meaning for an audience. In the mid-sixties a notable shift occurred in Canadian theatre as the effects of the recommendations of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences (or Massey Commission) began to be realised. Theatre infrastructure came into place through funding that began to be disbursed through the Canada Council in 1957. By the mid 1960s, the predominance of foreign theatre in Canada began to be challenged as arts funding became available for both the construction of new performance spaces and the creation of Canadian plays by Canadian playwrights and theatre companies. In 1965 John Herbert’s *Fortune and Men’s Eyes*, the first Canadian play explicitly dealing with homosexuality, was seen in a workshop performance at Stratford (Carson 210). However, the performance was closed to the public due to a presumed antipathy to the play’s contents (which featured characters in drag and coercive gay sex in a reformatory setting). The play went on to successful productions in New York and around the world. Yet a Canadian company did not mount a version of the play until 1975.

In this era, it was often easier for some Canadian theatres to program plays from other cultures than homegrown works, as works from foreign cultures and languages were presumed to have a “universal appeal” (Czarnecki 283). Alternative theatres, such as Theatre Passe Muraille in Toronto, programmed avant garde work by gay playwright Jean Genet in 1969. That same year, the company was charged under obscenity laws for a play concerning bestiality (*Futz*). Yet in this seemingly daring climate, written-in-English,
Canadian plays with gay themes were relatively rare. One might note that Michel Tremblay’s *Hosanna* met with success in the mid-seventies when programmed at Toronto’s Tarragon Theatre. Many of Tremblay’s plays are set in and around the Main, Montreal’s Rue St. Catherine, where marginal characters eke out livings at the fringes of society. As one of these, the character Hosanna evokes the Wildean model as a drag queen attempting to emulate Elizabeth Taylor and exhibiting a practiced effeminacy. Her partner Cuirette challenges that model with his own hyper-masculine drag. However, the play’s translation from jôual marks it as a work from outside of English Canadian culture and its position in regards to that culture’s development of gay theatre must be seen in those terms. *Hosanna*’s translation into English has also been considerably contentious, as its commentary about Quebec culture is expressed through “jôual's social, political and religious connotations and their repercussions in the text” (Koustas, “Hosanna” 132). Consequently, Tremblay’s partner and producer claimed translation was “fatal” to the play; he considered a “third” of the play was lost (Brassard 41). Whereas Tremblay has referred to Hosanna’s sexual alterity as a “political problem . . . that is a typically Quebecois problem,” Koustas argues that the English translations of *Hosanna* are left as politically decontextualised, and the play’s potential sexual metaphors are thus received as explorations of sex and love and not as commentary on Quebec society (Anthony 283; Koustas, “Hosanna” 134). *Hosanna* (and several other Tremblay works) offered Torontonians a detailed view into a gay milieu; however its translated language and culture appear as an exotic other to English language Canadian drama of the time.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Canada Council funds allowed for large, regional theatres to be established across Canada. By the seventies, a number of theatre companies
“alternative” to regional theatres were established on a smaller scale across Canada. Some of these theatres, funded in part to specifically showcase new Canadian theatre, along with project-based and independent productions (or “fringe” works) produced plays with gay presences during the this decade (McLeod 44, 50, 65, 141, 161, 163). Many of these works, such as John Palmer’s A Touch of God in the Golden Age were considered avant garde, not only due to their gay subject matter but also due to their production style, which often reflected the experimental ethos of the particular theatres of the time. Staged during a time where cultural attitudes were still overwhelmingly homophobic, performances of gay subjectivities were often considered and presented as political acts and as consciousness- raising pieces, intended to inform their audience of the experiences gay men endured in contemporary life.

By the 1980s funding necessities altered theatre creators’ ability to produce avant garde work in many Canadian theatre markets. Toronto theatre experienced “an increasingly conservative artistic climate” among its “alternative” theatres, relegating gay presences almost entirely to fringe productions (Wallace, Producing 87, 102 -103). This era saw a number of fringe companies in Canada, most notably Buddies in Bad Times, arrive on the scene to produce plays that challenged public notions about gay men’s identities (such as Sky Gilbert’s Cavafy). Over the course of the 1980s Buddies began to receive funding from various arts councils and become a regular presence in Toronto's theatre scene. Buddies and other subcultural companies with gay (and then later “queer”) mandates created “gay spaces” at their performances, as their works were intended and directed towards gay audiences (Wallace, Producing 34). These works were often challenged by various authorities who objected to the play’s productions receiving government funding
(Wallace, *Producing* 34). Funding issues often meant that gay sub-cultural theatre in this era was forced to operate outside various standards of professionalism (in terms of paying union scale, performance space, etc.) and increasingly turned to newly available festival and cabaret venues.

As AIDS became a prevalent concern in the 1980s, many fringe theatre projects addressed the disease with plays directly calling for government action. Other plays, such Colin Thomas’s *Flesh and Blood*, or Kent Stetson’s *Warm Wind in China* raised awareness of the disease by portraying its human consequences. With the introduction of HAART therapy, plays concerning the HIV/AIDS crisis became less frequently mounted and, by the end of the nineties, new theatre productions about the disease were rare.

In 1994 Buddies in Bad Times acquired its Alexander Street space. Funded by three levels of government, it was intentionally designed as a queer space (Halferty 242). Prior to this, Buddies had been a transient theatre company, existing in a variety of spaces, often sharing with other theatre companies (Gilbert, *Ejaculations* 178, 203). Having a permanent, visible and funded presence in the Canadian theatrical and cultural landscape contributed to legitimising gay theatre as being less a fringe element, and closer to the Canadian theatrical mainstream.

Similar trends appeared to happen across global English-language theatre markets. Andrew Wyllie notes that on British stages “[b]y 1994, a move of male homosexuality to the mainstream stage was distinctly perceptible” (108). In Canadian productions of Brad Fraser’s *Poor Superman* and Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America*, gay-themed works were for the first time widely presented on the stages of Canada’s regional theatres. Prior to these productions, the regional theatres had not as successfully mounted works with overtly gay
themes nor mounted them as broadly: *Angels* played in five regional theatres, practically from coast to coast, and by 1996, *Superman* had played in four. By playing in regional theatres *Angels* and *Superman*’s productions indicated a willingness by governments in Canada (through their arts councils) to fund (at nearly the highest tier of disbursement) theatre seasons that included overtly gay presences. These productions locate gay theatre as no longer being only at the fringes but also in the theatrical mainstream. As the regional theatres were originally imagined to promote cultural citizenship by creating a “national theatre”, the production of gay plays in regional theatres may also have signalled that gayness and gay citizenry were part of a national idea of Canada (Czarnecki 279).

Today gay presences can be found across almost all forms of theatre. For example, my research found that the Vancouver Arts Club (a theatre at the highest level of financing in BC) has over the last ten years programmed at one least one gay play per year (as defined by my criteria outlined in this chapter). Similar production of gay plays can also be found throughout most other regional theatres’ programming, as well as on a wide variety of other Canadian stages.

**Gay Representation on Stage**

These histories show both how the social location of gay men has evolved and, to a degree, how staged representations of gay men parallel this evolution. For the greater part of the last century gay representations or gay characters were coded, made invisible, presented as abject or otherwise marginalised. These practices reflected the legal, social, medical, religious, and commercial interests that shaped the social place of homosexuality at the time (Clum, *Still* ix, 1; Sinfield, *Out* 32; O’Connor 9). These representations usually did not speak to understandings that homosexuals had of themselves. Furthermore, these
representations came to be considered normalised codings and thus in some places became consistent theatrical practices. Thus, with gay liberation and civil rights progressions altering the social place and understanding of gay men, theatrical practitioners strove to find new terms for representing homosexuality. Yet a question remains as to why today, as this thesis will show, gay men and gay sex are seen in widely varying ways across the spectrum of theatrical production.

Theatres exchange a product of entertainment for the purchase of a ticket. However, the terms of these ventures vary widely across the spectrum of conditions. The span of conditions of production, from mainstream to fringe, directly relates to theatres’ finances. At one end, regional theatres maintain permanent buildings, often with more than one stage, and a large staff to service them. Utilities, upkeep, wages (often at union scale), and other costs require that mainstream theatres meet certain expectations of seat sales in order to generate income to help balance their books. At the fringe end of production, many of these costs do not apply, or are much smaller due to the nature of such productions. Fringe theatre thus can operate with less imperative to sell seats. While it is likely that fringe theatre-makers still hope to sell as many of their seats as possible, their risk is considerably less than those of larger, mainstream theatres. This situation maps risk along the continuum of conditions of production, where mainstream theatre must try to ensure a degree of sales in order for the theatre to maintain operations. While fringe theatre-makers can accumulate losses, these often come from the artists’ own pockets, and do not threaten the permanent employment of staff or the closure of buildings. Consequently, the imperative in programming for mainstream theatres requires that they program material that will please
audiences enough to maintain a degree of attendance. A fringe production can take far more risk in their choice of production material.

This understanding prompts questions. While gay representation is now found across Canadian theatrical production, do theatres consider gay representations risky when programming? If so does homophobia, in a potential audience, or entrenched in theatres’ practices, affect how gay characters are staged? Are gays staged in certain ways to reduce risk? Furthermore, if historical changes move asymmetrically, is it possible some theatres may be progressive in welcoming gay presences in some aspects of their productions, but are conservative towards gay expression in other aspects?

In a culture where homosexuals are now protected in law as citizens, contemporary Canadian theatre’s relatively common presentations of gay characters suggest that some audiences support the inclusion of gays as full members of society. Conversely, there remains a sizable portion of the populace that may not embrace all policies and practices directed at gay equality and instead maintain homophobic inclinations (Angus-Reid). This kind of audience may not wish to attend theatre featuring homosexual characters. Accordingly, theatres must, in the interests of their sales, acknowledge the sentiments of their audiences in their programming. However, given the advances in gay inclusion in society and the prevalence of gay characters in modern theatre, a balance must be struck between the need to fill seats and the need for a theatre to be inclusive and representative of popular political sentiments. One way to manage this balance is to be inclusive in terms of gay representation but cautious in terms of those representations’ degrees of explicitness. I propose that in order to manage risk, there is a broad range of representations of gay men on our stages, answering to various audiences’ expectations in particular circumstances. As
explained earlier in this chapter, it is the sexual aspects of gay representations that appear to be the most disruptive to some audiences. Thus at the conservative end of the range of representations, gay characters’ sex lives tend to be less addressed, less visible, and, if referenced, may be elided or de-emphasised. At the progressive end, gay sex tends to be overt, discussed, celebrated and in some cases, performed on stage. This spectrum does not mean that the appearance of gay characters with little or no reference to their sexuality do not have value. Gay characters on stage, when signified through a variety of means other than sexuality, still increase public awareness of gays and contribute to inclusion.

This situation offers the theatre as a place where two opposing value systems appear to be at work, and are manifested in a spectrum of expectation across a range of conditions. These conditions map the conservative representations of gay characters with mainstream theatrical production, where risk is highest, and the sexually engaged end of the spectrum with fringe theatre, where risks are generally lower.

The Mainstream to the Fringe

This section offers contexts and details to offer insight into the range of theatrical production in Canada in relation to the mainstream. I use the word “mainstream” here to identify part of a range of theatrical production. For this study I have divided this range into five sections based on parameters of professionalism, financial and government investment, programming, audience and location. None of these parameters on its own defines a kind of theatre and its place in relation to the mainstream, but in concert, these parameters construct and reflect a working definition of mainstream theatre. The categories in this range are neither absolute nor complete. However for the purposes of locating gay plays and their relationship to the mainstream, these categories function well.
Mainstream productions are works that usually have large budgets in the range of five, six or occasionally seven figures, and at the extreme operate to generate profits for their investors. These productions also tend to play to the largest audiences in the theatre industry, in large metropolitan cities (or in some cases in large, well-publicised festivals), and have professional casts and crews. These works can be further separated into for-profit and not-for-profit productions. For-profit works, where private funding is ventured in an attempt to generate dividends, are not considered for this study due to the nature of such theatre companies' programming. While for-profit theatre companies in Canada have mounted works with gay representations, there are few Canadian works selected for their seasons, and even fewer Canadian works with gay representations; there were no Canadian gay productions from the theatre market I chose to investigate (I have only been able to locate one Canadian, gay production at this end of the spectrum ever, anywhere in Canada, this being My Mother's Lesbian Jewish Wiccan Wedding, staged by Mirvish Productions in Toronto). The absence of Canadian work is due to the tendency of for-profit theatres in Canada to program productions that have been proven to be profitable in other markets prior to their Canadian appearances; this practice results in programming that is notably foreign, often reflecting trends of Broadway and the West End.

Large budget, not-for-profit theatre in Canada usually gains funding from private donations, ticket sales, and arts councils at various levels of government. The theatres that receive the largest amounts of government funding from arts councils (other than large festivals, like Stratford and Shaw) historically (and for the purposes of this study) have been referred to as regional theatres. The designation of a theatre as regional is unstable, but normally includes the theatres which have a large auditorium, and often a second or
occasionally third space for production. The regional theatre system is a loose construct of some fourteen federally subsidised theatre spaces established across Canada throughout the sixties and seventies. The system’s implementation embodied several ideas, including one that Canada is too geographically large to have a single national theatre; thus resource-based "regions" have been constructed with the presumption of a locally homogeneous audience (Wilson 2). Regional theatres were originally imagined to promote cultural citizenship by creating a multi-sited, de-centralised national theatre (Czarnecki 279; Hankins 68). As an aspect of cultural policy the regional theatre system operates as a subset of a larger economic policy. Taxpayer support for the regional theatres is part of an arts’ philosophy of the government that encourages and promotes Canadians’ interaction with their art as acts of citizenship. This philosophy is underscored in Citizenship and Immigration Canada’s publications through their promotion of the arts (“Discover” 25). In order to qualify for funding by arts’ councils, regional theatres need to operate as not-for-profit entities. As such, they are required to assemble boards of directors in order to oversee the companies’ various obligations and fiscal responsibilities. The members of these boards are drawn from the community, often from the business sector.

Regional theatres receive grants for production on a seasonal or multi-seasonal basis and their budgets and programming are scrutinised by granting bodies. While regional theatres are now in every province in the country, their programming tends to be rather narrow in its selection. Many regional theatres across Canada will program a number of the same titles if those plays have proved to be financially successful. In the mid-eighties, regional theatres’ programming was characterised as offering the "three C's", referring to contemporary, classic and Canadian fare (Czarnecki 281). Each of these "C's" reflected
ideologies of the arts councils that funded them. Walter Learning, founder of the Theatre New Brunswick, claims classics were included as "part of [a regional theatre’s] function is as a lending library" to help educate the audience and to underscore an ideology that Canadian theatre is in itself an outgrowth of an imperial, European model of theatre (qtd. in Czarnecki 281). "Contemporary" can be read as code for relatively recent works that are foreign, as imported works proven in other markets (again often from Broadway or the West End) can ensure both sales and positive reception, supporting requirements that theatres to be financially solvent. "Canadian" has predominantly meant and still means new Canadian work, although today also may refer to remounts of financially-proven Canadian works. While some regional theatres adhere less to this programming model now than in the 1980s, one can still use this model to characterise the majority of Canadian regional theatres' programming in this century. Vancouver's regional theatre was long considered to be Vancouver Playhouse (which closed in spring 2012). However throughout its history, the Vancouver Arts Club has also evolved into a regional-type theatre. Moreover, in the past ten years, the Arts Club has received more funding annually than the Playhouse, taking in the largest amount of federal and provincial funding for theatres in B.C. (Canada, “Searchable 2008”; BC Arts Council, 2008 67). As both theatres are similar in programming (both program the three C's) and capacity, I have chosen to study the Vancouver Arts Club’s 450 seat Granville Island Stage as representative of mainstream theatre because it receives the highest level of public funding of any theatre in British Columbia.

Tom Hendry coined the term "alternative theatre" (or "alternate theatre") to describe a movement in the 1970s where smaller theatres created work in reaction to the narrow
programming and large subsidies of regional theatres (Gass 405). Alan Filewod writes of the relationship between alternative and regional theatres in the 1970s as "an ideological relationship between mainstream (which means big) and alternative (which means small), and which accorded with a bourgeois model that understands culture in terms of polarities: high/low, establishment/avant-garde, commercial/experimental" (Filewod, “Erasing” 203). Although the term's original meanings may no longer apply, and the term "alternative" is problematic, it still is in regular use and is useful here to connote subsidised, not-for-profit theatres with their own performance space(s) that are generally smaller than regional theatres. Aspects of the term's original meanings still exist to a degree in terms of their relationship to mainstream regional theatres. The seasons programmed by alternate theatres tend to have smaller budgets and take more risks in their programming, mounting more premieres and more Canadian work than regional theatres (some have seasons that are entirely Canadian) (Hankins 73, 78). Like regional theatres, alternate theatres are run by boards and receive grants for production on a seasonal basis, their budgets also scrutinised by granting bodies. Vancouver's Firehall Theatre can be considered an alternate theatre in these terms. It uses professional casts and crews for its season's productions at its 175 seat Studio Theatre.

Many grant-funded theatre companies in Canada operate without their own buildings and consequently rent performance spaces. Incorporated as not-for-profit entities, these companies often serve a particular audience or generate a specific kind of work. Many project-based companies tend to produce the works of a single, individual theatre visionary, most often a playwright. These companies tend to produce one project at a time, and often may produce only one work per season, or less, and so are identified for the purposes of this
study as "project-based theatres" (This is not to be confused with project-based funding, a term used to classify form of arts grants). Their past history of critical success often determines their access to funds from various arts councils. Councils further require these companies to maintain levels of professionalism in their hiring of cast and crew in order to be eligible for funding. Conrad Alexandrowicz's *Beggars Would Ride* was produced by his company Wild Excursions as a rental production in a publicly-owned, 240 seat facility The Waterfront Theatre.

The term fringe refers to work that operates at the edges of the theatre industry. While the term fringe can imply the financial, dramaturgical or material considerations (or a combination of all three) of a production's alterity, the phrase is used primarily here to refer to a low level of financial investment. Funding for fringe theatre often consists of the available resources or credit of the production team. This financial arrangement affects production in a variety of ways. Mounting previously successful, contemporary works from other markets in Canada or elsewhere usually requires paying royalties to the play's original creator; and the ability to pay royalties is usually precluded by most fringe productions' budgets. As a result, the majority of fringe theatre in Canada has the playwright(s) or creator(s) as part of the production team. Fringe theatre may use amateur artists or may involve theatre professionals and pay union scale; however most unions also allow for waivers, exceptions and alternative co-operative agreements for theatre professionals to be able to do fringe work when potential funding may not allow union rates (Canadian Actors Equity). Lastly, fringe theatre is not normally adjudicated by boards, councils or production facilities. Fringe theatre can exist anywhere, and its audience usually reflects its location and the public discourse of the production. Grignard's *The Orchard Drive* was mounted as a
rental production, in the secondary space of the Kelowna Community Theatre, a new 110 seat venue named the Black Box Theatre.

**The Entire Theatre Experience**

Critical to my analysis is an approach to the ways by which meaning is created in theatre. Kier Elam discusses "drama" as "that mode of fiction designed for stage representation . . .", while defining "theatre" as "the complex of phenomena associated with the performer-audience transaction . . ." (Elam 2). He elaborates on these distinctions and demarcates two subjects for study of meaning in theatre, the dramatic text and the performance text, where the former is what the playwright crafts, and the latter is the sum-total of artistic expression that occurs onstage (3). In the following chapters each case study starts by looking at the original dramatic texts of each production to determine how homosexuality is positioned in the script. These sections examine each script initially without considering the place or conditions of its performances.

My work then moves to contextualise these scripts by discerning how various elements of their production may affect and communicate those texts' presentations of homosexuality. I consider other contexts that inform the performance texts and also a wider set of conditions that creates meanings beyond what happens between the curtain's rise and its final fall. Carlson and Knowles have both written about contexts supplemental to performance which create meanings other than those in the dramatic text, or can affect the meanings of a performance text. Carlson notes "the actual performance . . . is only a part . . . of an entire social and cultural experience . . ." (xiii). Knowles looks to "social and cultural contexts" to utilise a large range of sources that may create meaning (Knowles, *Reading* 10). He includes in this range the conditions of production (facets of the theatre, its
employees, design, location, history, traditions etc.) and the conditions of reception
(publicity, audience spaces, reviews, word of mouth, history, neighbourhood, etc.) as areas
that generate meanings in addition to, and also contextualise readings of, a performance
text. Together these conditions comprise the "material conditions [which] shape both what
appears onstage and how it is read or understood . . ." (3). These conditions supply "the
'context' within which the performance happens" (3). They may be seemingly invisible,
taken-for-granted notions, as in long-practiced behaviours normalised in theatre, or may be
particular to the current politics of the play's time and place. These material conditions
inform an audience's experience of a theatrical event before they actually take their seats in
a theatre and continue to generate meanings for an audience post-show. The summary of
these experiences, the audiences' familiarity with the theatre and its culture, their
knowledge of a particular production and experience of "going to the theatre" before taking
their seats, taken with experience of the performance text itself, and finally the experiences
that occur after the performance constitute what Carlson refers to as "the entire theatre
experience" (xiii). By looking to as much of the entire theatre experience as is available
from these productions' ephemeral traces, my project addresses how these experiences may
alter or affect how the play's gay subjectivities are received by an audience. This occurs as
the various modes of theatrical production affect the semiotics of the performance text in
the audience's reception. The entire theatrical experience may then generate differing or
even contradictory meanings in an audience than those that might be generated from
looking at merely a performance or a dramatic text. While all four plays have characters
that engage in male-male sex, the multitude of production and reception conditions of the
plays tend either to draw from or accentuate the overtness of this sexuality in performance, depending on the play's location in terms of mainstream production.

**Locating and Selecting Gay Plays**

Canadian theatre is politically diverse, regionally disparate, multi-lingual, multi-cultural, and is funded in varying ways in different parts of the country. Taking this diversity into account, and also containing the scope of my project, I sought to locate Canadian plays to study from only one English-language theatre market, in south-western British Columbia. This theatre market was large enough that I was able to both find gay plays across the spectrum of production and also to locate enough archival ephemera from those productions to study. Only plays performed after 2000 were chosen in order to have a temporal frame for the study.

Within these parameters I researched archival resources to create my own collection of various theatrical productions. These were gleaned from examining various press releases, reviews, advertisements, websites, archival ephemera and other media. My process of finding plays for the study was made difficult due to a number of factors which thwart gay theatre, or the mention of gayness in theatre, from entering into archival records. I have written much about this in "Seeking Clues of Queerness: Researching Contemporary Canadian Queer Theatre", and will reiterate some of the most prominent issues that affected my research.

Print media has tended to report gay art along a spectrum, where at one end gay themes and gay art are celebrated whereas at the other end media de-emphasises gay content in gay art (Berto 190). To researchers, this presents gaps in the records, where it may be either difficult to discern whether a play had gay content, or whether a play was
even given any notice at all. Furthermore, media specifically celebrating gay art often is not
collected into public archives. This is due to the fact that

. . . such publications serve the queer subculture on a variety of levels, they
include of a wide variety of content including: political action, news,
entertainment, services, sales – including pornography and sex-toys – and,
more often than not, prostitution and escort services. Such inclusions make
libraries and some retail outlets hesitant to carry their material. Many
publications also are free, relying on ad revenue for their bottom line. The
life expectancy of such media is also often limited. All these factors lower
the chance that their publications can be found archived in libraries. (Berto
194)

While Canada has a very well stocked Gay and Lesbian Archive that functions to address
such gaps, it is located in Toronto and is heavily Toronto-centric in its collection.

Other records also present research issues. Fringe gay theatre often relies on low-
budget advertising. While today much of this is done on the internet, in the early 2000s, this
often included illegal posterling and handbills, as opposed to print media often used by
mainstream theatres. As such, much of this kind of fringe theatre’s advertising ephemera is
not collected into archival collections.

A common trajectory for new playwrights is to create work in fringe theatre, and to
progress towards higher budget work in the mainstream through notice and recognition. A
certain degree of attrition occurs in this process, and playwrights that are not immediately
successful often move on to other interests. As such, many fringe playwrights never gain
“professional status” (Berto 195). This creates problems when researchers attempt to locate
the playwright. Until 2010, non-professional status playwrights were not considered by the Playwrights’ Guild of Canada. “Associate” memberships were available, but these still were not attainable by a number of fringe artists (“Membership”). These requirements affect researchers in two ways. They do not allow non-professional playwrights to be included in the Guild’s directory, which negates one common method of locating and contacting said playwrights. Furthermore, non-professional theatre is often not reviewed by mainstream journalists, thus thwarting an avenue through which records of the play may enter an archived document (Berto 195).

Lastly, much of the ephemera of some fringe works can be only a mere few lines of synopsis in catalogues, handbills, or festival programs. Usually written by the play’s producers, some of these, in the interest of gaining a wider audience, do not overtly indicate the queer or gay aspects of the production (194). However, some synopses rely on various codes to indicate to potential audiences that there is gay material in the production. Thus the researcher must become conversant in a number of codes used to indicate gay content. However, in some cases, no codes or indications of gayness exist. Without further records for such plays, such as scripts or reviews, the researcher may not recognise that a work is a gay play. These research constraints all point to difficulties in finding gay plays from the fringes of production.

After several months of combing through records, I located a number of titles that appeared to have a gay presence or at least one gay character. After compiling a list of these works, I then began the process of locating scripts and determining whether these scripts could actually be considered gay plays. This plan necessitated that I had a manageable definition for what I was to include as a gay play. After accumulating a large archive of
scripts with gay presences I began a process of sorting these plays into one of four groups, from mainstream to fringe (as described above) in terms of their productions' means. This process narrowed the choices in some of these categories. There are only two theatres which could be considered regional theatres in the study area, and of the gay plays they had mounted, not many were Canadian. Choosing a play from the alternative theatre tier presented similar issues. I also wanted to select first productions, as plays that travel with a provenance from other productions inevitably bring contexts from those productions. These contexts may not be relevant to the production being studied. After sorting plays by their means of production, I then chose one play from each group as a case study.

My selection was further determined by other factors. Each play selected primarily appeared to be typical of other works from its group. Plays were considered typical if they were produced with similar financial and production means as the majority of other plays in their tier, and that their playwrights were at a similar level of renown as most others in their group. However, at this point, the widely varying availability of ephemera left behind from productions became an important consideration. This range of availability necessitated I choose plays for which there was a body of accessible records with which I could work. Some established playhouses and regional theatres had comprehensive records of the productions of some of their plays, while records of other plays were missing or incomplete. Incomplete records necessitated that I not include the play for consideration. Some plays were well-archived in the press, yet their producers held little or no materials to share. Some theatres chose not to their share records for productions which eliminated their productions from consideration. The availability of the playwright, as a potential resource, was essential in terms of works that were closer to the fringe. Of over fifty fringe plays for
which I found records, I was able to contact fewer than ten playwrights. Of these, I was able to get scripts for three plays, and only able to find one with adequate records to study. Similarly, for project-based productions I was only able to find one artist with adequate records of a production. My selection process also controlled the style of play to be considered to some degree. This was due to the need to glean the most meaning from a production's ephemera. Accordingly I chose works that began as written scripts; works other than this kind, be they performance art, dance, physical theatre, etcetera, may leave behind scripts (or merely plans) but often lack enough material for an investigator, without the context of witnessing their performance, to be able to discern their gay themes. All these criteria ultimately produced an archive of around thirty plays. From these I then needed to determine a working definition to decide what I would consider a "gay play" as opposed to a play that merely had gay presences or representations.
Chapter Two: Historically Gay, Currently Theatrical

Daniel MacIvor’s *His Greatness* opened on October 11th 2007, on the Granville Island Stage of the Vancouver Arts Club. The drama is set in Vancouver in 1980, during a time when Tennessee Williams worked with a local theatre to mount one of his later plays. MacIvor's play imagines this time, showing two days in the lives of Williams (Playwright), his long-time companion (Assistant), and a prostitute (Young Man). The play was later remounted, playing in New York and London. The play was rewritten for a Toronto production. In each location, the play had different casts, directors and production-teams. In the Vancouver version of the text, the central section of the work was presented as an autobiographical creation by Playwright, with the play bookended by two short sections showing Playwright attempting to create the inner play. In the later, “final official draft of the play”, this structure is lost, as the play is bookended by monologues by Assistant (Roy).

In the version produced in Vancouver, MacIvor employs a strategy which allows an audience two main sites of interest in his play: a gay romance and a historical biography. By illustrating a gay romance, set when gays had few civil rights, the play can appeal to those who wish to know gay history and witness gay characters living under those conditions. By showing a supposed biography of one of the twentieth century’s most famous playwrights, the play also appeals to those familiar with Williams’s theatrical legacy. However, MacIvor’s text is coy in its representation of Playwright as Williams, never overtly mentioning him, but instead allowing the audience to make connections between Williams’s life and the play’s narrative, relying on an audience’s familiarity with the famous playwright and his troubled life. This familiarity allows some details about playwright’s sexuality to be inferred from Williams’s public renown as a gay man, rather
than being made overt in the text. MacIvor references his characters’ sexuality in his text, but he couches many of these references in metaphor and turns of phrase. The play’s gay romance potentially illustrates homosexual history by contextualising the lives of the lovers in a historical moment and particular culture. However, the play’s conditions of production and reception further reduce the visibility of this narrative, a story of a failing gay relationship; instead these conditions draw focus to a reading of Williams’s legacy as a product of his troubled genius. Thus, while MacIvor’s dramaturgical strategy allows an audience to experience a gay love story and presume to see a biographical drama, elements of the production underscore only the latter. As a result the elements of both the text and the entire theatre experience operate to reduce the visibility of the gay relationships, and particularly the sexual aspects of these relationships, in the play. In this chapter I initially explore the play’s text, illustrating how the script emphasises a reading of a gay relationship rather than a biography of a theatrical figure. I also illustrate how MacIvor’s text lessens the visibility of the characters’ sexuality though his use of language and his narrative exposition. I then look to the conditions of production and reception of the play’s performance, and argue that these further lessen the visibility of the both gay themes and gay sexuality in the text and instead draw attention towards the theatrical legacy of Williams's creative output.

**His Greatness Text: Gay Play or Theatrical Biography?**

Whether an audience sees *His Greatness* framed as more a story of a gay relationship or as a historical biography likely influences their reception of the play’s gay themes. MacIvor’s foreword to the play’s text reveals how he sees the play’s focus. In his foreword he reveals the text as being more about himself than Williams. MacIvor
recognises how "broken" Williams's plays are, both in their construction and by being filled with "broken" characters (ii). His reason for writing the play appears to be drawn from a similarity in writing styles. He discusses how his own plays are broken, and in this he finds a connection to Williams and his work. He states "His Greatness is not a play about Tennessee Williams" but rather a "play about three gay men living fully and openly in the world of the early 80s just before everything was about to change forever" (iii). He then references another connection to Williams who had claimed to be unable to write about human weakness without knowing those qualities personally. MacIvor's comments suggest that he shares this sense of a personal knowledge of human weakness. In this respect MacIvor ultimately concludes that His Greatness is "in its deepest, most flawed and weakest heart" a play about himself (iii).

MacIvor’s introduction suggests his play is underpinned by his own personal empathy and identification with his characters. As such it locates the story as being more from his own psyche than from a supposition of Williams's biography. MacIvor is an out, gay playwright whose work has frequently featured gay themes, and his foreword reiterates his connection between himself, his gay characters and the telling of their story. MacIvor's assertion that his play is not about Tennessee Williams, but rather is about three gay men, positions its reader to receive the character of Playwright more as vehicle for telling a gay story rather than presenting a biography of a famous theatrical figure. This notion is further borne out in the script. Tennessee Williams’s name is never mentioned outside MacIvor's foreword. The characters are named only by their roles rather than by proper names, which suggests that they are, to some degree, blank slates on which are drawn their personal details. Furthermore, the play does not suggest the portrayal of Playwright physically
emulate Williams. The only physical description of Playwright given in the text is that of "an older man", with no mention of any further staging details that might suggest Williams's physicality or persona (MacIvor 1). MacIvor also made it clear to Ed Roy, the director of the Toronto production, that the play is “not a bio-play about Williams” (Roy).

MacIvor’s text thus lets a reader understand that his play borrows from Williams’s life, but only uses it as the loose basis on which to write a gay story. The author makes no claim that anything in the text is meant to have a factual basis. This is made apparent by some obvious differences between the drama and Williams's life. Neither Williams's own autobiography nor Hayman's celebrated biography of Williams mentions him having a long-term companion or assistant after Frank Merlo died in the early sixties. Yet Playwright's long-term relationship with Assistant forms the central inquiry of the play. In this regard, and in other details, the play deviates from what is known of Williams’s life. Furthermore, the play appears to be Assistant's story more than it is Playwright's, even though the former character appears to be purely one of MacIvor's invention. (Roy sees the play as Assistant’s story. This fact is underscored in the rewritten version of the script – where the play’s bookends do not feature Playwright in the process of creation, but rather two monologues by Assistant, recalling the characters’ fates.) By creating the long-term relationship between Assistant and Playwright, MacIvor distances his work from the biographical record, and creates a work that is only loosely based on Williams’s life rather than a detailed accurate rendering.

However, the play's setting does relate to Williams's visit to Vancouver, where the play was performed. This fact likely would have resonances with an audience and could lead to an assumption of the play being more biographically based than MacIvor's foreword
suggests. The play appears to trade on its setting in Vancouver and the notoriety of Williams as a lecherous drunk. The combination of the play’s historical references and its gay story centred on Assistant presents differing reception possibilities to an audience. Certain audiences may look more to the play's biographical details and situate the play as an exploration of Williams's renown and the historical facets of his theatrical legacy, while others may approach the performance as a vehicle to tell the story of gay men of a certain historical time and place.

**Analysis of Assistant's Relationship with Playwright**

Both Playwright’s and Assistant’s uses of the phrase "his greatness" serve as convenient points to explore the complex parameters of the two men's relationship. While it overtly relates to Playwright’s career, it also serves as a quip both partners use to refer to their bond. The phrase’s use as the play’s title thus codes the significance of the men’s relationship. The multiple uses of the phrase delineate emotions and power shifts between the two that relate to their established functions in a long-term partnership. While it overtly frames the men’s relationship as one of employment, the contexts surrounding its usage inform of a personal romantic relationship. Its first utterance indicates a level of support and devotion that Assistant has for Playwright, despite the hard times they endure. Its second appearance indicates playfulness between the men, and a degree of equality and shared responsibility in their ventures. While these two references appear to support a reading of their relationship as a long-term gay couple contributing to a joint venture, the third reference undercuts this reading in some regards. This utterance is spoken to Young Man, and appears to establish Playwright reiterating and maintaining power in an employer-employee relationship. However the circumstances of this use of the phrase
indicate a level of emotional involvement between Playwright and Assistant which again undermines a reading of an employment-based relationship, or at least reiterates other dimensions to the men’s partnership. The phrase operates, through illustrating the relations of power and emotion between the men, to infer a devoted, long-term relationship that is similar to a marriage.

Playwright first utters the phrase when he wakes up hungover; "Will the assistant finally realize that after all these years the playwright has lost his greatness?" (MacIvor 13). The phrase introduces not only their relationship as a playwright and his assistant (or employer and employee), but also their names in the program and script, emphasising an overt reading of their relationship in these terms. The lines also indicate Playwright’s abilities as a writer (those that make "his greatness") have waned, and the two men have been together "all these years" (13).

"Finally" introduces aspects of their prosperity, as it suggests that Assistant has been reluctant to recognise that Playwright’s career has floundered. Playwright further comments on their fortunes when he refers to the quality of their accommodations, a "fading, downtown hotel" (4), by saying "we’ve come down terribly in the world haven’t we?" (15). Assistant describes their current circumstances as "misery" (21) and reprimands Playwright about his behaviour saying "Shameful, missing the preview last night" (13). Assistant asks "How do you think that made me look?" indicating his embarrassment at failing to keep Playwright sober, which presumably is part of his duties (13). As Assistant’s employment is tied to Playwright’s career, two questions arise from this exchange. Why does Assistant appear reluctant to acknowledge the failings of Playwright’s career? And why does he stay in Playwright’s employ? It is clear that Playwright has fallen on meagre times both
financially and artistically, leaving a reader to presume that Assistant might be moved to find better employment elsewhere. Assistant's devotion to Playwright and his choice to remain with him suggests other aspects keeping the men together besides an employment arrangement.

Assistant's retort to Playwright marks the second utterance of the phrase: "The only scenario His Greatness better concern himself with is getting his fat ass out of bed" (13). The words and tone are both overly-familiar, lacking in the respect due both a distinguished playwright and an employer. This familiarity is replayed as Assistant orders Playwright about over the course of the play, even though the former, as an employee is subordinate to his employer. These orders and directives appear to be for Playwright’s own good and Playwright mostly obeys them. They indicate that power is shifted from an expected employer-employee relationship, and that Assistant has some agency in their arrangement. This agency again suggests other understandings at play in their relationship besides those of employment. The sarcasm in Assistant’s use of "His Greatness", while light-hearted, further underscores the idea that Playwright has descended in reputation, and shows that Assistant is all too aware of their circumstances. Their tone throughout this scene is that of two people who are very familiar with each other: the tone of their banter is fond and playful, even though it is structured as combative and often is comprised of insults. The shifts in power and familiarity between them infer a kind of egalitarian relationship, similar to those found in some couples, where power-sharing and tone of address indicate a degree of mutual respect and equality.

When "His Greatness" is next said, the tone is in sharp contrast to its previous uses. Playwright says "Ah yes His Greatness does like to present me as being troubled in that
area, but that really, that’s his issue. I try to deal with my own concerns. So as not to tempt him from the sober path he has chosen to trod. If you follow me” (MacIvor 38).

Playwright refers to Assistant, while he speaks to Young Man. The quote relates to previous lines where Playwright has asked Young Man to procure cocaine (38). This "His Greatness" reference is spoken in response to Young Man saying "Your buddy said 'no drugs'” (38).

Young Man here responds to the appearance that Assistant is in control of Playwright’s life. Assistant has hired, set up and controlled the nature of the prostitute’s engagement with Playwright up until this time. Yet Playwright’s tone is condescending and dismissive of Assistant’s appearance of having control. In dismissing Assistant's directives and taking care of his own wants, Playwright devalues Assistant’s position as someone needed to watch over Playwright's well-being. Playwright also makes it appear that substance abuse is a problem that Assistant himself has, and thus the "no drugs" edict is to keep Assistant clear of temptation. Playwright allows Young Man to believe that Assistant can’t handle these indulgences. The exchange alters Young Man’s perception of a power balance between Playwright and Assistant, and reduces Assistant’s appearance of having agency.

In order to inquire about the drugs, Playwright also has just ordered Assistant to "get us a car" to remove him from their presence (37). The scene promotes other questions about their relationship. Why does Playwright need to order his subordinate out of the room in order to obtain the drugs he wants? Why does he not hire an assistant who will let him do as he wishes, and why does he keep this assistant in his employ? The scene suggests that Playwright is ashamed of his drug use, and wishes to hide it from Assistant. This sentiment is supported later in Act Two where Playwright attempts to keep a bottle of nasal spray – suggesting his use of cocaine – hidden from Assistant (52). When the nasal spray is
discovered, Assistant scornfully disapproves (65). Hiding his drug use from Assistant indicates that Playwright values the opinions and approval of Assistant, and suggests an emotional bond between them. If Playwright had no emotional connection to his employee, then he would have little need to hide his drug habit from him. Yet Playwright appears ashamed at the spray’s discovery.

These uses of the phrase "His Greatness" circulate around the central dramatic inquiry of the play, which questions the full nature of Assistant and Playwright’s relationship. In moments of privacy, where their relationship is invisible to outsiders, Playwright and Assistant share power in the relationship, and communicate in banter, which makes them appear to enjoy their intimacy as equals in a relationship. However when speaking to Young Man, Playwright thwarts the perception that he and Assistant’s relationship is anything other than would be expected of an employee. Playwright also implies that he is keeping Assistant from being tempted by cocaine. The comment appears paternalistic, negating perceptions that Assistant has any agency in their relationship.

**Affection and Sexuality**

Affective and sexual aspects of Playwright and Assistant’s relationship are revealed late in the second act. However many of these details are also coded, or are less than overt in their exposition. Near the end of the play, after Assistant appears to have left their long-term arrangement, Playwright tells of their coming together fourteen years before. Playwright explains that Assistant was "in the company of an older friend . . . And he was on a roster, at an agency . . . of young gentlemen . . . although being . . . twenty nine, he was on the older edges of the business" (72).
PLAYWRIGHT. And there we are at dinner and all night long he
keeps looking at me, with this kind of Cheshire grin. Which is not
the way, him an escort, his gentleman there beside him – well
you know, you know where one should put one’s attention –
shouldn’t be flirting with me. But then after I suppose enough
drinks, I looked across the table and I said to him: ‘What are you
thinking?’ And he said, ‘I’m thinking, I wonder what I could get
you to do for twenty dollars.’ (MacIvor 72)

Playwright then reveals that, "out back, in the bougainvilleas . . . I showed him what
I’d do for twenty dollars" (73). Assistant is presented as having been an "escort". The
context allows an audience to infer that Assistant was a prostitute, with whom Playwright
proposes a financial arrangement. However the transaction does not adhere to typical
conventions of prostitution, suggesting other motivations bringing the two men together.
The script reverses the usual financial exchange so the younger prostitute offers money –
twenty dollars – to the obviously wealthy and older john, for what took place "in the
bougainvilleas . . ." This switch suggests a transposition of the power relation that usually
derives from such a transaction. It also shows that there is something other than a financial
trade at hand and speaks to some other intention, or attraction between the men. The
"twenty dollars" is from then on an inside joke between them, yet also acts as a metaphor to
code for their sexual and emotional attraction to each other from that moment. Playwright
quotes the phrase "twenty dollars" when attempting to evoke Assistant's sentiments. On
page twenty, after the two have quarrelled about their abject circumstances, Playwright
mentions that Assistant still owes him twenty dollars, from fourteen years before. This has
the effect of "lightening up" Assistant, who then stops complaining (MacIvor 21). The tone of their bickering becomes less combative, and they agree to the plans of the day. The phrase's emotional salience is reiterated when Playwright discusses "twenty dollars" with Young Man, saying “And I never did get my twenty dollars. And all these years later that’s a funny we have, now and then I’ll say to him: ‘you owe me twenty dollars’. He gets a charge out of that” (73). The phrase also serves to indicate a kind of equality between them, by implying that given that no money was exchanged, and that there was genuine attraction. However, there are no overt expressions of this attraction or other acknowledgments of their relationship in the text. Thus the visibility of their relationship and shared sexuality is available only through codes in the language that come out of the couple’s history.

More indications of an emotional engagement between them are shown at the end of Act One. This scene serves both narrative threads of the play. The scene’s indications of an emotional engagement make plain both Assistant's and Playwright's perceptions of their relationship. Yet the scene can be looked at through the lens of a historical biography. The scene shows Assistant trying to thwart Playwright embarrassing himself when the latter offers Young Man a future that cannot possibly be realised, and thus underscores the depths to which Playwright has sank in his career. (Williams also notoriously sank into addiction and delusion in later life).

After the three characters return from a performance, Playwright suggests that he may have "found me a little muse here" in Young Man (44). Shortly after this, Playwright seems agreeable to Young Man’s suggestions that he act in one of Playwright’s works (46). With Playwright out of the room, Assistant then attempts to change the course of events. He attempts to distract Young Man with a sexual overture, which is rejected. When Playwright
returns, Assistant then begins to mention a number of Playwright’s insecurities, attempting to both take control of the moment and to sabotage Playwright’s tryst. With Young Man then out of the room Playwright challenges Assistant about this:

PLAYWRIGHT. Why are you doing this?

ASSISTANT. I'm not doing anything. You know how it goes.

PLAYWRIGHT. Well I know how it has gone, and I know I no longer want to go there, nor do not want to be dragged there. I think you should go.

ASSISTANT. No.

PLAYWRIGHT. I say go to your room. Go on. I want to have a moment with my young man.

ASSISTANT. Yeah well you should have seen your young man coming on to me before.

PLAYWRIGHT. You stop it now. Stop it. Look at yourself. Look how you get. Pinched and spiteful.

ASSISTANT. Do I?

PLAYWRIGHT. Yes. Why is that?

ASSISTANT. Years with you I guess.

PLAYWRIGHT. You call it misery. That's your name. Don't you drag me down into your misery.

ASSISTANT. You are my misery.

PLAYWRIGHT. Well then leave your misery and go to your room.

ASSISTANT. He hasn't been paid.

PLAYWRIGHT. I'll take care of that.
ASSISTANT. Where did you get money?

PLAYWRIGHT. You are not my keeper.

ASSISTANT. I’m not?

PLAYWRIGHT. You are not my wife.

ASSISTANT: Well what the hell am I then? Tell me that? How do you think this makes me feel?

PLAYWRIGHT: Your feelings are your own concern. This is my night. (47-48)

This exchange operates as the crisis of the play, and also offers the most overt insight into the characters’ relationship. When Assistant plays on Playwright’s insecurities, Playwright reasserts his authority as an employer and orders Assistant out of the room. Assistant then further tries to sabotage the tryst by revealing sexual overtures offered to him by Young Man, in order to provoke jealousy from Playwright. Playwright questions Assistant's emotions in doing so by labelling him "pinched and spiteful". When Playwright states that he has funds at hand to pay the prostitute, he negates Assistant’s control of their finances. When Assistant asks about the fund’s provenance, Playwright again reaffirms his power and a business understanding of their relationship, telling Assistant that he is not "his keeper" even though Assistant takes care of their financial responsibilities. When Playwright then adds "You are not my wife", it evokes an emotional response from Assistant, who questions the place of his feelings and responsibilities in their relationship. It should be noted, that in the subsequent, rewritten version of the play, that Playwright strikes Assistant at this point (His Greatness). This assault heightens audience focus on this point of the play, as it is the only instance of violence, and one of the only moments when the characters touch each
other. The assault allows a reader to examine their relationship further. I believe the relative prevalence of domestic violence in contemporary media, as opposed to employer-employee violence, likely creates resonances for a reader with the former. It allows them to view the action as a kind of wife assault.

While jealousy concerning Young Man appears as the impetus behind this exchange, this emotion does not appear to be based on sex, as Assistant has procured the prostitute for Playwright without complaint. The displays of jealousy occur while Young Man appears to be replacing some of Assistant’s roles in Playwright's world. The text earlier refers to Assistant as "the once and former muse" (5) who "was going to be an actor" in one of Playwright’s friend’s shows (79). A proposal that Young Man now act as a muse in Playwright’s dramas replays Assistant’s past, where a prostitute came into Playwright’s life, then stayed on as a muse and attempted to work in Playwright’s field (44). The narrative suggests that Young Man is replacing Assistant’s role. The sexual aspects of Young Man’s employment for the evening are downplayed as Playwright offers him a role in an as yet unwritten play. It is Playwright’s need for a muse, and Assistant’s past trajectory from a muse to his present position, now replayed by Young Man, that threatens Assistant. His jealous reaction to Young Man’s encroachment implies that his original feelings for Playwright are still in operation.

When Playwright tells Assistant that he is not his "wife", he denies an aspect of their relationship, one that would justify the type of emotional attachments that evoke such jealousy. If Assistant’s place in Playwright’s life is only as an assistant, Playwright's claim that "You are not my keeper" further denies Assistant having a level of agency in their relationship, and the understanding of his position is again reduced. Playwright makes clear
that emotions or "feelings" are not his concern, implying they are outside the realm of their relationship as he now frames it.

These scenes show different aspects of Assistant and Playwright's relationship. It exists along a continuum where its expression ranges from a strictly employment-based arrangement to one that has the sexual attraction of a muse and artist, to an emotionally intimate bond. Implied in the bond are emotional attachments, a degree of caring for each other and a balance of power. The visibility of their relationship appears to determine which end of the continuum is acknowledged. In the presence of an outsider, Playwright insists that the relationship between himself and Assistant is based on employment. Playwright thus publically distances himself from suggestions of love or an emotional attachment. In so doing, he shows himself as available to other's attentions. However, at times when Playwright and Assistant are alone together, the other end of the continuum is seen, where Assistant is also able to share in the control of their relationship and the two of them appear to have an emotional investment in each other.

These complex narratives invite readers to question the characters’ lot and to empathise with them. By the end of the play the couple’s future appears bleak and uncertain, as both Assistant and Playwright are left in precarious positions. Their insecurity promotes questions about their co-dependent relationship, including its financial aspects. Assistant performed duties that allowed the two men to maintain a degree of fiscal solvency. Without Assistant, Playwright seems unable to care for himself and earn an income. This is made clear when Assistant instructs Young Man in what is involved in Playwright's care: "he's got to be off the booze for at least three days before the teaching or you'll never get him in the classroom . . . [and you] don't want to get blacklisted from
teaching 'cause that's where the money really comes from" (72). Assistant's compensation for his efforts appears to have been minimal. When Playwright references their funds he says "We have money." Assistant, who handles their finances, refutes this statement replying "Not according to the bank" (71). Through the use of the plural "we," this exchange infers that finances are considered shared between them. Assistant's despair over Playwright's spending on drugs, aside from indicating a concern for Playwright's well-being, seems to suggest that Assistant doesn't have his own means or finances outside their mutual penury (71). After putting fourteen years of his life into his relationship with Playwright, he is now in his forties and cannot likely return to his previous work as an “escort”, his youth now faded. In sum, the Assistant’s investment in Playwright's career has cost him his youth, and while allowing him a meagre existence his situation has left him with seemingly little security or apparent earnings. Moreover, his partner refuses to acknowledge their relationship at times, or the apparent emotional connections they share. Assistant's position at this time promotes the play's reader to consider the fairness of their relationship and other, similar relationships where power is predicated by the generation of income by only one partner.

References to Marriage

Assistant's question "What the hell am I then?" makes plain that he needs some kind of acknowledgement of their relationship in terms other than that of an employee. When Playwright states "You are not my wife" and Assistant replies "I'm not?" it is clear that the two men have differing ways of framing their relationship. Their conflict opens possibilities for the reader to look into and reflect upon partnering relationships between gay men, as the text suggests the role of "wife" as a frame to consider Assistant's place. The conflict also
has resonances with the various debates surrounding the legal acknowledgement of
alternative relationships. The play was written in early 2005, during a time when same-sex
marriages were being debated in both provincial and federal parliaments. The topic of
same-sex marriage consequently was prevalent throughout Canadian media that year,
appearing in over 15,313 print articles (“Canadian Newsstand” 15 July 2012). While same-
sex marriage was unavailable at the time of the play's setting, the word "wife" has
resonances not only in Assistant's gay relationship but with other discourses concerning the
rights of common-law spouses at the time of the play's setting.

One can easily imagine a woman performing Assistant's role being considered a
"wife." Assistant's use of the word "wife" appears an apt descriptor considering his role in
relation to Playwright. At the time the play is set, homophobia was normalised in Canadian
culture and equal rights for gay men were only just entering into common public discourse
(Tom Warner 104). Moreover same-sex marriage was likely unthinkable among the general
Canadian population. Canada's Charter of Rights – from which came legislation that
eventually equalised gay men's legal standings in Canada – wasn’t adopted until 1982
(Canadian Heritage). Consequently there was little recognition of, and protection for, same-
sex pairings at the time the play was set. Playwright does not see the relationship in the
same terms as Assistant, who views it as a marriage. The exchange points to the problem of
being a “wife” when a “marriage” dissolves.

Modern divorce laws now protect those who have supported a spouse's career
through the division of assets. Presently, in North America "marital property will generally
be shared, regardless of whose direct efforts resulted in the acquisition of specific assets"
upon a marriage’s dissolution (Bala 202). These protections allow partners who perform
unwaged work (such as the keeping of a household) to have entitlements to assets gained during the relationship (Rathwell; Pettkus). In Canada, in the late seventies, these protections were extended to include heterosexual common-law pairings, but did not include same-sex partners until 1999 (Pettkus; M. v. H.). The depiction of men’s relationship presents a glimpse into the world prior to these laws and into procedures where the law did not recognise unmarried or same-sex partnerships and so, same-sex partners had no common property. By presenting the relationship and showing the unfairness of such circumstances, the play asks its reader to consider just solutions and the changes that have been made in contemporary legal and social practice since that time.

MacIvor’s text articulates with historical discourses of same-sex marriage, spousal contribution, and common-law partnering. In doing so it reveals and critiques cultural conflicts that circulate around these discourses. Non-traditional marriage pairings are now common in Canada; legal protections for members of such pairings are also likely common knowledge. MacIvor’s text illustrates our past by presenting a pairing that lacks present-day protections for its partners. *His Greatness* appears to ask at what point do mutually co-dependent relationships becomes analogous to modern, legally-protected domestic partnerships such as marriage or common law marriage? If there is affection, sex, care, investment or any combination of these present in a relationship, does it deserve to be considered legally recognised or protected?

The text asks the reader to consider gay equality by illustrating an era when gays’ relationships were without the legal protections they have today. *His Greatness’s* text illuminates the consequences of historical discrimination towards gays, where their relationships weren’t considered legal or protected by law. The play thus comments on
same-sex marriage debates, and also draws parallels to women's positions in marital and quasi-marital contracts in the play's era. Yet the play makes these comments and draws these parallels through the story of a failed gay relationship that is overtly presented as an employee-employer association. Regarding the relationship in this way also allows an audience to consider the aspects of employee-employer relations that may occur in various marriages. However, aspects of Assistant and Playwright’s relationship that refer to their sexuality, are less than overt; some must be inferred through codes in language and metaphor.

**Conditions of Production and Reception**

Most the play’s production draws focus to the narrative of Williams and his theatrical legacy. Furthermore, some conditions of production allow for an audience to be distanced from the play’s gay themes and sexuality. This occurs through the variety of conditions of production and reception which, by creating a horizon of expectations, directs an audience's focus away from reading of the play’s commentary on relationships and toward readings about Williams’s history. This horizon is created through the theatre's public discourse, its advertisements and media, the physical and socio-geographic aspects of its performance space, its amenities, stage design, and the theatrical culture of production (including the theatre's history, hiring practices and professionalism). Other conditions, the playwright's reputation, reporting on parliamentary debates on same-sex marriage, and the theatre's subscriber-base all contribute to ways through which the gay subjectivities are framed in this production. Ultimately a script that has potential to illustrate the consequences of heterosexism and homophobia, and accordingly could unpack some contradictions between individual and social values in Canada, is framed as being about a
historical playwriting genius and his playmaking. Aspects of homosexuality that inform the meanings in the play are downplayed and made less visible; homosexuality is ultimately pathologised as a mere aspect of Playwright’s genius, along with alcoholism and dissolution. The remainder of this chapter explores these conditions of production and reception and how these frame the play’s meanings.

**Conditions of Production**

*His Greatness’s* conditions of production contribute to the audience’s “entire theatre experience”. The theatre's means of operation reflect priorities of commerce and capitalism. Through the theatre’s dramaturgy and play development process these priorities may also create frames that reduce the visibility of the play’s expressions of gay sexuality. The historical conditions of production also help construct the theatre's audience and create a particular kind of expectation of product and entertainment. The expectation created does not overtly reference the aspects of gay relationships or gay sexuality available in the text. These aspects are entirely invisible in the portion of the horizon of expectation that is created by the theatre’s operations. Only through a foreknowledge of Williams’s life would an audience member be able to bring an expectation of gay themes to the show.

**Development and Dramaturgy**

*His Greatness’s* route to production followed a somewhat typical path for new Canadian work by an established playwright. The play was written in early 2005. The first workshop was with Montsgo Theatre Project at Encore Theatre in San Francisco in 2006. The play was then given readings at the Neptune Theatre, a regional theatre in Halifax, directed by Linda Moore, who also directed the Vancouver production. It also was developed at the Stratford Festival in 2007 and at the Arts Club's own ReACT: New Plays
in Progress Festival, and dramaturged there by Rachel Ditor, the Arts Club's production dramaturg (Program, *His Greatness*). The development process includes several areas where gay content may be scrutinised or may affect the awarding of a grant. These areas include personal biases, political liability, and revenue generating potential.

All three of the Canadian workshops/readings were funded by the Canada Council through the respective theatres’ play development programs. The Canada Council for the Arts claims its purpose is "to foster and promote the study, enjoyment and production of works in the arts, and operate at 'arm’s length' or independently of government" agendas (Canada, "Background"). Ric Knowles comments that the function of public-funding agencies is to "espouse a philosophy of public accountability in which the arts are expected to cultivate and represent . . . community values at home (an educational role in the production of good citizens)" (Knowles, Reading 56). Knowles appears to be saying that publically funded arts are intended to represent, and perhaps reinforce, some understandings of local or national ideals. Adjudicators for the Canada Council are usually professionals drawn from their respective field. They are selected to “allow for a diversity of views to inform a collective decision-making process” (Canada, *Peer*). While this practice is intended to ensure fairness in the dispersal of grant monies, it also allows an avenue where adjudicator’s individual biases may affect the awarding of grants. Given the transition in public understandings of gays in Canada, such funding may be contentious, depending on Council adjudicators’ individual positions on these understandings.

The three Canadian theatres where *His Greatness* was workshopped were all of such a size that their Canada Council grants were received in multi-year sums (Canada, “THEATRE”). The theatre’s ability to attain ongoing grants depends on a variety of
measures, such as how “the company’s programming choices . . . reflect the company’s artistic mission and on how relevant these choices are to its audiences,” their “production and (or) development of Canadian works . . . and artists” and “quality of work” (5).

Theatres submit descriptions of their present and projected programming, including descriptions of projected audience, and box office. In this way, interests of commerce and audience appeal may enter into the granting process. While some theatres list as many confirmed potential productions as are scheduled at the time of application, theatres that work on controversial or factious material, such as gay themes, may have to take into account how this material will be received and perhaps justify its inclusion in a grant application.

While the Council claims to operate at arm's length from government, it may be affected by government’s various agendas. Not only are the Canada Council's overall budgets determined by the federal government, this funding – when used to support gay theatre in the past – has become a football for political parties in Ottawa (Wallace, Producing 34). Canadian politicians have often used the funding of gay culture as a wedge issue to affect and reflect constituents' sentiments towards the arts and culture. The Harper government's 2010 de-funding of Toronto Gay Pride is an apt example of this kind of action (Bryden).

The arm's length arrangement of arts councils supposedly insulates its purse strings from government biases. However, such insulation is not always free from political machinations. As S.M. Cooper notes:

The fundamental flaw in cultural funding through the arm’s length principle rests in the very problem it sought to avoid: government intervention.
Intervention can be in the form of severe budget cuts . . . or in the form of political manoeuvring or censorship based on content restriction of the funded projects. No matter the style of intervention, complete insulation does not exist . . . . The taste of the patron historically determines what is produced, whether that patron is an individual or a state. (Cooper 258)

Canada has a long history of political interference in our grant councils, on all levels of disbursement, dating back to as far as the eighties and continuing into this decade (Carr-Harris; Nestruck and Dixon; “Stopbcartscuts”, Pacific; Wallace, Producing 34). A contemporary example of this interference includes BC government moving funding from the BC Arts Council to its Sports and Arts Legacy Fund in 2011, where eligibility is determined by “politically-advantageous initiatives” for what is referred to as “politically directed money” allocated at ministerial discretion. (“Stopbcartscuts”, Pacific). A further example illustrates how funding for Canadian theatre had been presumed to have been withheld on political grounds. In 2010, a spokesman for the Harper government “criticized the use of public funds to help SummerWorks stage Homegrown” (a play based on the terrorist group the Toronto 18) even though no member of the government had read the actual script (Nestruck and Dixon). The following year the Department of Canadian Heritage pulled SummerWorks’ grant of $48,000, in what appeared to be a reaction to the festival’s programming the year before (Nestruck and Dixon). While the Canadian Heritage does not operate at arm’s length (unlike the Canada Council), their withdrawal of funding for a successful and well-reputed festival was considered by some as political and ideological interference in the arts (DeGroot). I mention these occurrences because at their least, they may encourage a cautious atmosphere for grant adjudicators when dealing with
gay-themed programming. As artists themselves, adjudicators’ work may also depend on a government’s willingness to continue arts funding at certain levels. Risking political or public displeasure by approving grants to controversial programming in such an atmosphere may affect their own livelihood, should a backlash against arts funding in general gain momentum.

That said, Canada Council adjudication “committee members will also be selected with consideration to fair representation of gender, generations, Aboriginal peoples and the cultural and regional diversity of Canada” (Canada, “THEATRE” 4). While this list may ensure a wide variety of political perspectives in adjudication committees, it notably lacks sexual orientation as a consideration. Furthermore, council members likely also have vested interests in free expression in the arts, and the Canada Council claims to “support freedom of artistic expression from control or dominance by external forces such as governments and markets” (Canada, "Background"). This situation may make the dispensing of grants a somewhat contentious task, one that may confront the divergent ways of considering homosexuality that circulate in Canada. Adjudicators may favour the freedom for artists to tell stories about homosexuals, but may also be wary of the ways in which those stories may be told.

Given these potential avenues through which gay material may affect development, there is no way to know exactly how the dramaturgical process and grant monies may have shaped the expression of homosexuality in *His Greatness*; MacIvor does not discuss this aspect of his process. However, as will be seen in the discussion of the dramaturgy of *The Shooting Stage* and *Beggars Would Ride*, the ways in which homosexuality is expressed in these plays can be important considerations in the process of the play’s development. In
terms of theatres accessing development funding I have outlined a few locations where biases and political climate may enter into the process. Furthermore, given that MacIvor has been well-established in the Canadian theatre scene for over twenty years, it is likely he is well aware of circulating pressures that may inform how grant monies are disbursed. His choices to develop the play at these institutions would suggest *His Greatness* was an apt fit with the kind of projects for which each theatre has received its grants.

Commercial potential may also play into grants adjudication. While the Council claims that it “believes . . . [in] freeing art from complete reliance on the marketplace”, grants are based, in part, on a company's past successes and record (Canada “Background”). When large companies like the Arts Club apply for grants, they have to inform the Council of their previous uses of grant monies as well as describe their current plan, in terms of programming, for the next seasons (large companies often apply on a three year basis). If the expression of certain themes in the arts may lead to higher potential risk for sales, then this concern may present itself in the development process. Ric Knowles comments that "provocative subject matter with socially interventionist potential tends to be both developed . . . and *packaged* . . . in ways that can blunt the provocation and subvert or contain that potential" (Knowles, *Reading* 37). If a play is developed for a particular market, where ideological affinities of audience and tradition are known, one might expect these affinities to affect the development process. Plays with provocative subject matter, such as expressions of gay sexuality, may appear to threaten the affinities of a certain market, and that theatre’s potential to sell seats.

Most script development by theatres also takes into account the financial considerations of the play's potential production. Playwrights usually hone their projects
through these processes until such time that the play is deemed ready by the playwright and the theatre. Such development occurs at most regional and alternative theatres, as well as some project-based theatres. Dramaturgical processes are usually framed as aesthetic exercises through which plays improve towards production readiness, and being presented as product. Theatre companies' financial requirements for fiscal solvency bring to the process ideas that production-readiness equals some degree of potential revenue generation. These concerns may be manifest in a variety of ways, from reducing a cast’s size to considering setting and sets to contain costs. This process also may take into account the expected audience of the finished work. Plays with themes that ideologically or politically challenge their potential audience may not be considered marketable as product to those particular audiences. Developers are likely keenly aware of what kind of challenges their audiences are willing to explore or not. With these considerations, theatrical development converts plays into product, and in this process potentially provocative subject matter can be blunted or reshaped or contained, in order to realise the play as the best (most revenue-generating) product the theatre can present. Dramaturgical choices thus can reflect a balance between commercial, political, aesthetic and other interests. Where a theatre’s development team sees a play presenting some themes that may potentially differ from those of the theatre’s constituent audience (such that these themes may significantly lower the number of patrons in seats), these themes may be de-emphasised, or made less overt through the play's dramaturgical development.

The theatrical presentation of gay themes is not overt in *His Greatness*. The play appears, at times, a throwback to earlier eras where both the social and legal status of homosexuality made open depictions of homosexuals or performances of gay sexuality on
stage illegal and thus any representations or hints at homosexuality were necessarily oblique. MacIvor uses similar tactics when approaching his characters’ homosexuality as the audience is asked to fill in details for much of the story from narrative and euphemistic clues in the script. What the "business" that the assistant is in, or what went on "in the bougainvilleas" is left entirely to the audience to surmise rather than being spelled out explicitly (MacIvor 72). No actual sexuality is referred to in the phrase. "Twenty dollars" serves as a metonym for the two main characters' entire fourteen-year long sexual relationship. Assistant’s original position as an "escort" is shrouded by the noun’s euphemistic meanings. No sexual activity is shown or even overtly spoken of, although it is available in the subtext. Even when Playwright is left alone with Young Man, a prostitute hired for the evening, the depiction of sexuality is genteel. Young Man takes off his clothes—down to his underwear—but then is stopped, and asked to read passages of literature while Playwright watches. The moment in the play is striking in its cessation of an expected sequence of events. While staging sexual acts is fraught with directorial problems, and thus is often initiated before a black-out or uses some other suggestion to inform that sex is about to happen, the script makes clear that sexual activity does not happen at this moment. The director of the Toronto production states that he intended his production not to convey a supposition the two men have sex (Roy). This choice likely derives from the play’s narrative germ, where an acquaintance of both MacIvor and Sky Gilbert was hired to only read in his underwear to Williams. In Gilbert’s play based on the same event, My Night with Tennessee, the same events occur, with no physical sexuality happening in their meeting (Gilbert 165-9). The sequence instead conflates sexual desire with literature, and so aestheticises it as foreplay while not representing any actual sexual contact (MacIvor 50).
While this may be construed as a kind of sexual experience, it is not what could normally be considered a sexual act. An audience might presume at this point that Playwright is impotent, a not unreasonable presumption given his poor health. Nevertheless, homosexual activity is at most implied, and not overt.

Even MacIvor’s most explicit moment – when Young Man describes himself as an "aggressive bottom" – may still require a willing and informed imagination for some to glean its meaning. Bottoming is a term from gay-subculture, and there may be some in the theatre’s main audience who are unfamiliar with that sub-culture, and thus may have little exposure to the term. In using the sub-cultural term, MacIvor may be requiring his audience to position themselves as gay in order to read the full meaning of the term. However, even then the audience does not gain any further explication or exposition of the sexuality that the term suggests.

Staging gay sex carries meanings that go beyond an equivalent staging of heterosexual sex. And while performing sex or sexual contact presents difficulties for performers – nudity alone is cause for some performers to turn down roles – such performances can powerfully affect audiences. Sinfield points out that as plays construct their constituency, in processes that are initiated in their dramaturgy, the question is asked of “whose knowledge, experience, beliefs and feelings are being appealed to . . .?” (Sinfield, *Out* 343). Sinfield refers to this appeal as a play’s “address” (345). Given the demographics of the Arts Club’s audience, and a realisation heterosexuals make up the majority of the population, the play’s “address” is likely not meant to primarily appeal to the knowledge, experience, beliefs and feelings of a gay audience. *His Greatness* appears to specifically address an audience that, while they may act as voyeurs and be eroticised
watching Young Man strip to his underwear, and may gaze from a gay viewpoint, do not see any actual homosexual contact. In this regard the play’s dramaturgy appears to acknowledge what Clum sees as “the threat [that] gay physicality [has] to some members of the audience” (Clum, Still 10). Clum claims that it is the physicality of the homosexual act, or “embodied homosexualit[ies]” that is threatening to certain heterosexuals. In His Greatness they can be, as Clum has chronicled, “comforted” that such acts have “been safely restricted to words” rather than performed actions (11, 13). Thus, Clum claims in order to constitute a heterosexual audience, homosexual acts that would “force themselves” onto an audience must be calculated to not alienate its members (13). Given both Clum’s and Sinfield’s understandings here, it is likely that the realisation of His Greatness as the most revenue-generating product may negate the inclusion of “embodied homosexualit[ies]” in the script.

The scene’s construction with its approach to, and then recontextualising of, an erotic interaction has resonances with the conceit of the inner play being viewed as a drama by Williams from the early eighties. While Williams’s work eroticised the male form in a number of plays, his characters did not show any overt homoerotic physical contact. Furthermore this lack of physical intimacy also speaks to the anxieties around homosexuality in the period that the play is set.

On the other hand, “gay audiences will see [embodied homosexuality] as affirming” (Clum, Still 13). For many men the defining characteristic of being gay is sexual activity that occurs between two men. To call oneself a homosexual nominally means to engage, or to desire to engage, in gay sex. Seeing what for many is a defining characteristic of their identity performed onstage can be revelatory – especially in a climate where gay culture
may abound, but embodiments of one’s defining characteristic may be rare or invisible. Critic Nicholas de Jongh attributes gay sex’s importance in gay theatre to the forces which lead to that invisibility, writing “if gay plays are possessed by sex . . . it is because homosexuality remains stigmatised and penalised” (de Jongh, “Love”). Joan Scott, remarking on (gay author) Samuel Delaney’s first experiences of seeing gay sex on a large scale refers to how visualising normally isolated gay sex acts imbued in him a “sense of political power” that was “both frightening and exhilarating” and gave a “sense of participation in a movement . . . ” (Scott 774). While Scott also critiques the use of experience as historical evidence, Delaney’s reaction nevertheless underscores the potential disruptive or revelatory reactions such viewing may provoke. So while embodied homosexualities may afford powerful meanings for gay constituents, they can also be threatening to certain heterosexual audience members. MacIvor’s dramaturgy of His Greatness, with less than overt presentations of gay sexuality, appears apt for a kind of audience that would be threatened by more overt expressions of gay sexuality.

This is of particular interest when considering MacIvor's back catalogue. Much of MacIvor's early work is non-naturalistic, and some could be considered highly meta-theatrical, absurd, or satirical. Many of his works feature gay themes, and these explore numerous aspects of gay living (eg. The Soldier Dreams, Two to Tango, In On It). MacIvor also had a long-term relationship with Toronto's Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, the foremost gay theatre in Canada. After a series of very successful one-man, multi-character, meta-theatrical shows beginning in Toronto in the nineties, MacIvor began to write for Mulgrave Road Theatre in his home province of Nova Scotia. These plays (How It Works and Marion Bridge) are notable in their departure from earlier works, in both style and
subject. Both plays are written in a realist/naturalist style, and are focused on family
dynamics. Both appear to be apt for an audience that may be threatened by overt
expression of alternative sexualities, as they feature no mentions of non-heteronormative
sexuality. *Marion Bridge* has proven MacIvor's most successful play, and it is regularly
featured on community and little theatre's programs across North America. Since 2006
Tarragon Theatre in Toronto has programmed some of these and other of MacIvor’s newer
plays (*How It Works*, *Communion*, *A Beautiful View*, *Was Spring*). These plays similarly
contain little or no non-heteronormative sexuality. While both the plays *A Beautiful View*
and *Marion Bridge* (from the 2000s) coyly suggest some characters are lesbians, by the end
of both plays these ideas are refuted. While Tarragon has been considered an alternative
theatre, it can be characterised as the top tier of such theatres in Toronto, and maintains
high prices for a largely subscription based audience. It has been the fourth highest
recipient of Canada Council grants for theatres in Ontario for several years (Canada,
“Searchable” 2008, 2009, 2010). MacIvor’s works in these theatres (which program more
conservatively than does Buddies) notably feature little or no non-heteronormative
sexuality.

*His Greatness* appears to borrow aspects of both MacIvor's earlier and later works.
Like his earlier works, the play addresses gay subject matter, and with its expressionistic
bookends offers a non-linear narrative. And like his later works, the great majority of the
play is presented in the style of "naturalism" (Program, *His Greatness*). While the play
clearly has gay themes, they are not as overt as in his earlier works. As a MacIvor play, *His
Greatness's* style is situated in between his avant garde, and often gay-themed works from
the earlier part of career, and his much more traditional works, seen at Mulgrave Road and the Tarragon.

**Performance Text**

Details of the conditions of production and reception allow a further examination of the production of *His Greatness*. However, this analysis is also limited by the availability of records and ephemera from the production. Whereas a broad range of records was available for some of the plays examined in this study, various ephemera, such as set and costume designs, and scripts from the play’s developmental stages, were not available for *His Greatness*. However, press stills created for press kits were located. While these kinds of photographs are not taken from actual performances (they are usually created before the actors have finished their rehearsal process), they generally feature the actors and some costume details to be used in performance.

The press photos show three actors all who appear to somewhat approximate the ages of the characters (as based on a historical figure) they play (Allan Gray was age sixty at the time and Williams would have been sixty-eight when in Vancouver). When dressed for the reception they all appear in era-appropriate formal wear. However, when in casual clothes, Playwright wears oversized glasses, a casual sports-jacket and a wide lapelled shirt with an open neck. Actor Allan Gray also wears a neatly trimmed beard. A simple Google image search finds numerous photos of Williams in the seventies in similar attire, with a similar beard. Moreover, Playwright’s glasses appear to be identical to the eyewear that Williams sported in that era. The details and nature of the Gray’s costume appear to promote a reading of Playwright as Williams.
Theatre Company

The Vancouver Arts Club was initially formed as an amateur group for artists in 1958 ("Arts", Teachers). In 1964 it gained its first performance space, and in 1972 became professional (Wiebe 100). Since that time it has grown to include three stages and it programs up to twelve shows per year, year round, with additional tours of three or four shows in the BC interior (Wiebe 101). The company's revenues for 2005 were 8.7 million dollars (Wiebe 101). In this regard it is the largest producer of theatre in British Columbia, and as mentioned earlier, the largest recipient of both Canada Council (receiving $345,000 in 2007) and BC Arts Council grants ($300,000). The program for His Greatness also lists numerous other sponsoring individuals over five pages. The listings allow both patrons and the theatre to promote their business as being involved with a sense of community and culture. There are corporate sponsors: banks, airlines, and media outlets, as well as citizen clubs and an upscale automobile dealership listed. These sources of income all reflect market economies of the middle to upper classes. Their place in the program underscores the kind of demographic the theatre serves. The theatre operates as a member of PACT (the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres), and hires theatre professionals under their various collective agreements, requiring the theatre to pay many of their staff at rates set by their union or guild. These professionals are considered, through their experience and training, to be at the top levels of their craft. Accordingly, the Arts Club maintains high production values.

Conditions of Reception: Advertising and Public Media

The public media for the production of the play clearly focuses on the narrative of a historical biography, rather than the narrative of a gay relationship. The Arts Club produced
two main print advertisements for *His Greatness*, and used these with various combinations of text. These were reproduced on posters, brochures and flyers and distributed through post, print and electronic media. One of these featured an actor from the play, representing Playwright in late life, bearded with glasses in a dressing gown. He is seen frowning over a typewriter, with crumpled sheets of presumably failed writing strewn about, a half-empty bottle of liquor open beside him, and holding a glass of drink to his forehead. The second ad featured a pen-and-ink drawing borrowed from a renowned photograph of Williams attending Dylan Thomas’s funeral in 1952. The graphic shows an upper torso in a suit-jacket that clearly represents Williams’s likeness. The words "Inspired by a potentially true story about two days in the last year of the life of the American playwright Tennessee Williams" are called-out along the bottom of both ads (His Greatness). Just under the play’s title the words "A Snapshot of Genius" appear. One ad calls out "Tennessee Williams in Vancouver", suggesting both the mounting of the MacIvor’s play, and *His Greatness’s* reference to the time that Williams spent there. Both ads feature the phrases "One of Canada’s most highly regarded artists" and "A new Daniel MacIvor play is always exciting" in small black-on-white font across the top. Other versions of this ad also contained messages about the theatre’s paired production, *The Glass Menagerie*: "Classics in Context. Pair *His Greatness* with *The Glass Menagerie*, Tennessee Williams’s first masterpiece".

The first advertisement promotes the play as being about Williams’s biography, the "Snapshot of Genius" suggesting that the play is concerned with Williams’s creative process, and infers his creative struggles through the presence of liquor, the playwright’s appearance of frustration, and the discarded pages (His Greatness). The second ad
underscores this message by creating a recognisable semblance of the artist. While the first ad connects to the outer frame of the play, which features the playwright’s creative process, neither the theme of Playwright’s gay relationship, nor any indications of the two other gay men in the inner play are indicated. One unfamiliar with the play, or Williams’s personal life, might expect a play oriented around a writer’s creative process rather than the exploration of a long-term homosexual relationship, the central feature of the script. For even those who are familiar with Williams’s orientation, the ad offers no expectations that that aspect of the playwright’s life will be addressed.

Discourses created by these advertisements create potential horizons of expectation for the play's performance which exclude the play’s gay themes. Glancing at the ad without reading the smaller text, a viewer might even expect that His Greatness is in fact a Tennessee Williams play, as some theatres do use well-known playwrights’ images in their promotion of those playwrights' plays. This misunderstanding could also be promoted by the poster that suggests seeing the play in rep with The Glass Menagerie, the call out of "Tennessee Williams in Vancouver" and the comparatively small fonts used giving information about MacIvor. If a viewer were to see these ads as their initial introduction to the play, the play’s gay contents would be invisible.

Theatre advertising often includes season brochures. The Arts Club’s season brochures frequently are stuffed inside play programs, and allowing the viewer to place the current production within the context of the theatre’s season. The 2007 season for the Arts Club featured ten other productions in their spaces. Of these plays, three were Canadian shows successful in other markets (and concerned topics of hockey, old age and middle age), one was remount of a 1994 local collective work about motherhood, one was a
premiere comedy about life on BC’s gulf islands, four were American musicals, one was an adaptation of a classic Frank Capra film, and one was *The Glass Menagerie* ("Archives"). The Arts Club programming can be considered to be similar to the Three C.s model – where both established and new Canadian works are programmed (contemporary and Canadian), along with a large selection of older successes from foreign markets (which may be considered as classics) ("Arts Club” *Past Seasons*). All the other programming is what might be considered light or entertaining fare, with the possible exception of John Mighton’s *Half Life*, which addresses geriatric dementia. However, few of the plays deal with subject matter as serious as the disintegrating relationship of same-sex partners that are found in *His Greatness*. Considering its themes, MacIvor's play stands out as a more risqué venture than the rest of the theatre's season.

Previous years’ programming may also frame a viewer’s horizon of expectation. In the twelve years prior to *His Greatness*’s production, the theatre mounted occasional plays with predominant gay issues and identities (*The Rocky Horror Show, The Stillborn Lover, Cabaret*) along with a few other plays with minor gay presences, averaging about one per year. If a viewer were familiar with the long term history of the theatre, approaching the gay themes in *His Greatness* may not be entirely unexpected. However, if one were to look only to the other fare in *His Greatness*’s season, it is unlikely to offer any greater foreknowledge about the themes the play addresses.

**Geographical and Material Aspects of the Theatre**

Attending a performance of *His Greatness*, a viewer would travel to Granville Island, an area on False Creek off Vancouver’s downtown. Granville Island is a toney, reclaimed industrial site which, with federal money, was converted in the 1970's into
cultural centre ("Granville"). The Island is operated by the Granville Island Trust, an advisory body composed of nine members drawn from and representing business, artistic, residential and government interests ("Granville"). The site has five theatres, a number of studios and art galleries, an art school, boutiques, shops, and a market interspersed with pedestrian walkways, seaside picnic areas, parks and street performers. It is known as a tourist area, and is accessible from the city core by a short ride on a sea-bus. The theatre’s location has easy access to a large part of the population, and Granville Island’s location appears to be a place where a wide section of multi-cultural audiences might venture for entertainment. To the south it is mostly surrounded by medium-rise residential housing and condominiums. This area was mostly built after a period of the urban renewal which began with Expo ’86. A short trip across False Creek to the north lie newer high-rise condominiums and the downtown. The theatre is also in proximity to Vancouver’s "gay ghetto" or the "West End" ("Neighbourhoods"). Gordon Ingram describes this area's importance: "The West End has been a strategic and mythic locale in Canada’s homosexual male, gay, lesbian, and queer cultures and politics . . . (1).

Granville Island advertises itself as "a place moulded by a fascinating history, buzzing with a colourful artistic community" ("Granville"). Its website claims one would find "a vibrant and diverse mix of people and activities," which appears to indicate a presence of both multicultural patrons and activities. The area’s multi-cultural appeal is gleaned through the various programming and community events. Native Canadian, Asian and Inuit arts are advertised on their website “Arts and Culture”). While multi-culturalism may be considered to include a vast array of subcultures, one can not find any reference to non-heteronormative subcultures in Granville Island’s self-description.
The space is also framed as a "Vancouver’s Town Square . . . [w]here locals and visitors come together" which appears to acknowledge two functions of serving both the community's and tourism's interests. The Island's funding and advertising orient it as a federally sponsored site of urban renewal and community, a place where arts and commerce are intermingled and presented for tourists, realised as the epitome of modern Canadian and Vancouverite values. One of these values is family. On its website's catalogue of suggested activities "treat the little ones" titles the second page. This page lists a wide variety of children's fare. The area’s promotion as a "family space" for children frames its reception by the public. The area’s management appears to interpret and control this perception by controlling expressions of alternative or non-heteronormative sexualities presented there. An example of this control is seen in the production of two other gay plays presented at another theatre, The Waterfront, also on Granville Island. In 2005 and in 2006, posters for Happy Birthday and Take Me Out were both refused display on Granville Island, presumably because of their homoerotic content. Alternative versions of both posters were created showing less male flesh (Harris; Blue). Both were produced by Raging Theatre, operated by David Blue. He refers to Granville Island management’s pronouncement of the area as "being a space for children" as a rationale for refusing the posters' display. While neither poster showed genitalia, their celebration of male physique was refused for public display.

**Theatre Space**

The theatre building is located at the west end of the Island and offers sweeping views of the sea and the downtown. Prior to the eighties, the building had a number of industrial uses, most recently as a chain factory (Canadian Encyclopaedia "Arts"). The
site’s adaptive re-use is intended for a viewer to gain a sense of history and connection to the area’s industrial past. As with much of Granville Island, traces of this past can be seen in architectural shapes of the buildings as well as in larger industrial forms left preserved as curios and sculpture about the space. The remodelling of the Arts Club building affords it a post-modern style, with a mixture of corrugated metal and warm wood on its exterior. The theatre gives the impression of a well-funded, modern institution, and the traces of the area’s past and the building’s working-class origins are difficult to discern due to its extensive renovation. Furthermore the theatre is surrounded by expensive shops and is overshadowed by the downtown’s looming mass of post-modern, glass buildings (mostly condominiums). The combination of extensive renovations, high-end boutiques and new condominium towers lends a general air of affluence to the building and area.

Entering the building, a viewer finds a comfortable lobby with a soft seating space with coat-check that allows for gathering and socialising before and after the show. The building is attached to the Backstage Lounge which has a restaurant, catering and full-service bar. The space is available for bookings and features an expensive menu (“Event”). The Granville Island Stage is a substantially sized theatre (440 seats), with soft, permanently-fixed seats arranged on a rake around a stage apron thrust a few feet from a proscenium arch (“Company”). The space is carpeted and features finely-finished, wood-panelled walls. In this regard the space conforms to traditions commonly found in regional theatres across Canada, where a certain degree of opulent comfort is maintained. Tickets are sold by the individual seat and seats have differing prices, according to their placement in the theatre, with some tickets for the best seats priced over fifty dollars (“Arts Club”, Buy). The theatre's overall presentation is as an upscale venue, where the entire experience
is oriented around an evening of leisure, centred on a comfortable viewing of entertainment. Accordingly, the company requires a steady income in order to maintain the space and its degree of refinement. Such an income of course relies, in part, on the theatre’s ability to sell seats. The area’s impression as an upscale venue, with its reliance on well-heeled patrons, suggests that businesses there take few risks in terms of the fare they offer.

Stage

The design of Granville Island stage allows the audience to be able to distance itself from an intimate encounter with the play and its themes. Several features of the play’s production in this space contribute to this distancing. A proscenium arch gives a fourth wall view to the stage. This traditional use of staging separates performance space from audience space, and in His Greatness’s performance actors do not break through the fourth wall. Ric Knowles writes about this construction:

> The 'picture frame' or proscenium stage (as progenitor of the cinematic and television screen) is the closest thing that theatre has to an audience-stage relationship that contemporary English language theatrical cultures considers to be normal . . . [it] make[s] manifest a particular monarchical, hierarchical social structure, in which, when it emerged in the seventeenth century the best seat in the house, the one from which the depth perspective was perfect . . . was that of the king, prince or duke. (Knowles, Reading 63)

While Knowles notes this understanding has changed over the years, he writes that the structure still can inscribe "economic rather than hereditary stratifications . . . reflected in graduated ticket prices" and other means (64). Whether the Arts Club theatre space would necessarily cause an audience to receive the play passively, and perhaps be insulated from
any gay sexuality or potential social critique, is uncertain. However, the space’s indications of class could also create frames for reception that control the play’s meanings in a similar fashion. The theatre’s comforts, finishings and ticket price all code for an expectation of high culture and a reception by middle-class, or higher, audiences. Such expectations are likely to “control . . . transgressive elements in society in the interests of the reproduction of the dominant order” (Knowles, Reading 10). If an audience member were to find expressions of homosexuality transgressive, the theatre’s design may allow for a distancing between that member and the play’s transgressive material.

The style of the production may also contribute to a distancing. Knowles refers to Catherine Belsey when noting a connection between naturalism (the style of the central portion of His Greatness) and this kind of space and how it shapes meaning. He writes

The proscenium . . . constructs the ‘readers’ of a performance as ‘passive consumers’ rather than active producers of meaning . . . The dominance of the proscenium . . . is closely related not only to the dominance of a particular kind of play, often referred to as ‘poetic naturalism’ . . . but also to the ways in which . . . audiences and critics have produced meaning.

("Reading" 258; Belsey 125)

Yet other scholars believe the proscenium stage is an effective site to actively engage audiences. Certain playwrights of provocative and politically charged material, intended to rouse audiences (such as Ibsen and Brecht), have written their works with proscenium stages in mind. Ultimately, any connection between the architectural style of a stage (and an associated dramatic style) with passive reception may thus depend entirely on the individual viewer’s past experience. Personally, past experience has led me to generally expect
politically unchallenging fare, usually in realism, when I enter a room with a proscenium arch stage. *His Greatness*’s program labels the style of the play as "poetic naturalism" (Program, *His Greatness* 2). Various scholars have also described Williams’s work in this way (Bak 15; Gottfried 115). Other than the play’s two page-long bookends, *His Greatness* is set in four periods of real time over the space of two days. In these periods, the play’s characters are presented as real people. These elements of the text suggest the play conforms to conventions of both realism and its subset, naturalism. Both represent an “allegiance to an art of representation or imitation of unheroic everyday life” presented on a stage “that resembled a room with the fourth wall removed” (Banham 907).

Knowles writes further that "naturalism creates a secure sense of order by delivering its ideology as normative" (Knowles, *Reading* 141). The form’s conventions make audience participation – other than applause – unlikely, thus also distancing the play from the audience. Furthermore, *His Greatness* is set twenty seven years before its production, which temporally distances the audience from the realism of its presentation onstage. The set design furthers this separation by incorporating a wide, painted-green border along the front edge of the apron. The playing area is thus contained physically and temporally, creating a layer of separation between audience and dramatic action. This separation may then thwart an intimate encounter with the play, instead offering a more detached observation.

Ticket prices promote more distancing. The most centrally located seats command the highest charges, suggesting that the best experience of the play is from a particular position in the “house”. This seating arrangement also ensures rows of other patrons serve
as a buffer between the performance and the best seats. Seats closest to the stage or on the periphery are priced at a lower rate.

Program

The play’s program further creates frames of meaning. Its cover shows a photo of Williams in midlife, with a cigarette. Yet it is altered to a di-chromatic of blue and red, and made to appear as if a strip of paper, which includes the subject’s eyes, has been ripped out. Such a presentation evokes pop art, especially the seventies works of Andy Warhol. The words "two days in the life..." appear in a typewriter-styled font on the top border of the cover’s design, and again suggests a biographical play, with an emphasis on motifs of the setting's era. But again no details about the homosexual themes are suggested. Inside the program, a six paragraph biography details Williams’s writing and life. And while it mentions, briefly, issues of alcoholism, addiction and insanity, no mention is made about the playwright’s sexuality, nor any of the gay themes in the play even though, as some authors have suggested, Williams’s substance abuse is likely linked with his troubles negotiating his sexuality (Vidal xxiv; Sinfield, Out193).

The program reiterates the quotes about "a snapshot of genius" and "inspired by a potentially true story about two days in the life of the American playwright Tennessee Williams. . ." used on the play’s posters (Program, His Greatness). These quotes again focus a viewer's attentions to biographical aspects of the play and also to an examination of the playwright's intellectual connection to his art. While the Vancouver production of His Greatness does examine the playwright’s creative process, this exploration is predominantly addressed in the play’s book-ending frames, a mere two pages of the eighty-page text. The opening depicts Playwright in a darkened space, an expressionistic setting.
As he describes details of a scene the stage lights up and the inner, naturalistic play begins, suggesting the play's main narrative is itself a play by Playwright. After Young Man leaves at the play's end, the final scene reverts to an expressionistic style, and Playwright begins to write, starting with the stage directions of the play's beginning. The scene suggests that the pair’s relationship has become material for Playwright’s new play. This meta-theatrical structure allows the inner play to comment on, and illuminate, Playwright's writing process, and how his personal, emotional abjection directly moves his creative process forward.

While these bookends do allow the viewer to make a connection between Playwright's creativity and his gay life, they allow another layer of distance in the reception of the play's larger, predominate, central narrative. The viewer looks to the inner narrative as a piece of theatre written by Playwright, with the bookends suggesting that Playwright's personal experience informs the creative process. The viewer receives three layers of narrative embedded within each other (the central play is created by, and based on experiences of Playwright, who in turn, is in a fictive narrative by Maclvor, a narrative which is loosely based on Williams's circumstances). With this mode of reception, the outer material (about the playmaking process, a famous playwright's biography and history of Vancouver theatre), frames and distances the gay-themed work to the layer furthest within.

Critical Reception

Press and other media reviews also create frames for audience reception, and these are useful in not only allowing a viewer to gauge a play-going experience prior to attending, but also by offering a researcher an indication as to how the play's themes were interpreted in performance. Although His Greatness has been performed in other markets (sometimes with the same script), the material conditions of these performances are far too different (a
project-based production, a fringe production and a for-profit production) from the Vancouver production to render reviews from them to be useful for any comparative analysis in this study. Like the Arts Club’s advertising of the play, the Vancouver reviews for *His Greatness* predominantly focus on Williams as the subject of the play. Most reviews point to his time in Vancouver as suggesting the play as a kind of theatrical reminiscence. While many reviews are positive, most express a desire for more of the playwright's creative process to be revealed, reflecting the theatre’s advertising of the play. While the advertising made invisible all gay aspects of the play’s narrative, in reviews the play's central relationship is in some cases acknowledged, but in others goes largely unaddressed. However, when gay presences in the play are mentioned they often appear to reference Williams’s notoriety. They also delve into and exaggerate the play’s sordid or salacious aspects: Young Man in his underwear reading to Playwright, references to prostitution, and suggestions of paedophilia are all mentioned, whereas the dissolution of Playwright and Assistant’s relationship is barely noted.

Chris Gatchalian (writing for *Xtra!West*) notes the performance does not offer "what made . . . the artist tick", instead showing the "now widely circulated" portrayal of Williams as a "boy-chasing drunk" (Gatchalian). The review doesn't connect the artist's sex/romantic life with his frustrated artistic production, an association that the outer frame of this version of the play expresses. From his review, Gatchalian appears to want to find the connection between artist and creation that the play’s advertisements suggest. He also brings to his perception of Playwright the “widely circulated” reputation of Williams. Gatchalian is an out, gay playwright and *XtraWest!* is a publication serving the lower mainland’s queer community. Colin Thomas's review in the *Georgia Straight* acknowledges Assistant as "a
one-time lover and long-time companion," and his relationship with Playwright as "an uninteresting marriage." However he finds it "exposes no depth of love, and no compelling threat to their bond" (Thomas, “His”). In his opinion the play "hits home" when the "beautiful youth becomes the Playwright's muse" and strips to his underwear (Thomas, “His”). The reviewer seems to want more about Playwright's muse and its connection to his sexuality and creativity, praising the aforementioned scene because "love and talent have gained some importance" in the play. Yet the overarching narrative of Playwright and Assistant, and its effect on Playwright's creativity, are not referred to in terms of these parameters. Thomas is also a gay playwright and The Georgia Straight is an alternative bi-weekly serving the area. Jerry Wasserman (The Province) makes a similar complaint about the creative process, writing "nothing here tells us much about what made Williams the artist tick." While he acknowledges that Assistant and Playwright were "once lovers" and "once Assistant was the Playwright's muse," his review does not accord this relationship any influence on the Playwright's creativity. He does however point out that Williams was "addicted . . . to pretty young men" (Wasserman). Wasserman is well-reputed theatre academic and performer. The Province is a corporate-owned daily. Jo Ledingham of The Courier briefly acknowledges Playwright and Assistant's relationship, writing that the latter "looks after every detail" and "reveals a deep affection" for Playwright, but nothing more. Yet she also mentions how "Williams prepares for a night of hot sex with a cocky, would-be porn star" (Ledingham, "Tennessee"). The Vancouver Courier is owned by Postmedia Network Inc., a large conglomerate with several daily newspapers across Canada. Peter Birnie (Vancouver Sun) warns the play is "heavily homosexual, as it should be" (Birnie, “Drama”). Again mentioned is Williams as "notorious in his desire for the street trade he
dubbed 'young gentlemen' " (Birnie, “Drama”). He does mention Assistant's relationship with Playwright, but frames Assistant as a stereotype, "a bitchy gay sidekick" who starts "out as a lover and [is] now cleaning up the playwright's messes". Kamal Al-Solaylee (Globe and Mail) focuses on a wider range of gay themes than other reviews. He refers to the era's positioning of gay issues, in that "His Greatness draws three portraits of male sexuality struggling to find a place in the pre-AIDS playground of 1980." Yet he also comments on one of the only relatively undisguised references to gay sexuality. He writes "even if the small audience on the Saturday matinee I caught was uncertain how to take some of the sexual banter – the young man describes himself as an 'aggressive bottom' in the porn-industry parlance – the production hit the ground running . . ." (Al-Solaylee). His comment suggests such a reference is unexpected by the kind of audience in attendance. Al-Solaylee is an out, gay academic. The Globe and Mail is a national daily paper owned by the Woodbridge Holding Company.

These reviews create and reflect a horizon of expectation the production constructed for its audience. All reviews focus on Playwright, referring to him as Williams, despite his listing in the program as the former. This conflation between character and historical figure comes as no surprise given the play's media and MacIvor’s coy presentation. These references follow the production’s focus on Williams while operating to close the gap that MacIvor placed between his play and his source of inspiration in his foreword. Furthermore a number of reviewers look for explorations of Williams's creativity, without actually analysing the central narrative of the play: the end of a fourteen year, gay relationship, and its connection to the creation of the inner play that is presented. All look to Williams (as
Playwright) as the main interest, especially in regards to his notoriety during his Vancouver visit.

It is here that most reviews engage the play's gay themes, referring to prostitution, the youth of Williams's sexual targets, and the play’s oblique references to transgressive sexuality. Thus most reviewers conflate their foreknowledge of Williams’s sexuality with the suggestions of sexuality onstage. The descriptions of Playwright's sexuality, using phrases such as "boy-chasing drunk," "beautiful youth." and "addicted to pretty young men," also connect more to Williams’s reputation than to events on stage. While some reiterate the "young" descriptor of Young Man in the program, the words “young”, “youth” and “boy”, may lead a reader to the impression that Playwright has paedophilic habits, even though in the text Young Man is clearly named to be twenty-eight years of age (MacIvor 49). The tone in these descriptions is both titillating and prudish in that they appear to both intrigue and warn their audience with the play's gay contents. The gay themes focussed on in the reviews also evoke the various narratives of the four Ds. In naming Playwright as "addicted to pretty young men," Wasserman evokes both mental instability and, if not outright paedophilia, at least lechery towards age-inappropriate sex partners. Multiple references to "rent boys," prostitution and drug taking also associate the gay themes of the play with criminality, underscoring perceptions that associate gays with dangerous behaviour. If the play’s author intended for audiences to infer information about the play’s characters from Williams’s reputation, the play’s reviewers’ descriptions of Playwright/Williams appear to prove MacIvor successful in that aim.

Even though the reviews mention a number of gay themes only one of them explicitly mentions the play’s long term gay relationship, the dissolution of which forms the
play’s central dramatic arc. While gay themes may be absent from the theatre’s promotional materials, their appearance in reviews selectively reinforces marginalising perceptions of gay men (often drawn from outside the play and from Williams’s reputation) as corollary thrills to a historical figure's biography, and to the exclusion of other aspects of the script. The script’s clues which inform of affective aspects of Assistant and Playwright’s relationship are seemingly missed by reviewers, or at least considered not worthy of mention. It is interesting to note that three reviewers are out, gay men and two of these are fellow playwrights. The papers they write for cover the range from mainstream daily to alternative weekly. Yet they don’t differ greatly in their perspectives on the play from the other reviewers. Gatchalian, in the gay weekly Xtra!, reiterates Williams’s penchant for boys like Ledingham and Birnie, while failing to see the connection between the play’s central relationship and Playwright’s creativity like Wasserman and Thomas. Only Al-Solaylee appears to discern a commentary in the play about gay lives existing in a prohibitive era, while simultaneously commenting about his fellow audience member’s uncertainty about any gay themes coming at them. The amount of overall notice given to the play’s central arc suggests that the horizon of expectation the theatre created for the play (one that focuses on Williams) generally directed audiences’ attentions away from that arc. Of the two sites of interest MacIvor created in his play, the conditions of production and reception appear to have shifted focus onto the biographical narrative rather than the dissolving relationship.

**Audience**

Much of the conditions of production and reception for *His Greatness* suggest specific kinds of audience. *His Greatness'*s predominantly realistic dramaturgy reflects in
part the majority of the Arts Club’s non-musical programming. In this regard the play appears an apt fit to the Arts Club audience's usual expectations. Peter Cathie White, the theatre’s director of sales and marketing, says that the theatre’s "[c]ore audience is women, household income over $100,000 and [who] live within a 5 km. radius of the theatre"; "this audience is an average age of 55" (Cathie White 28 Mar. 2008; Cathie White 24 June 2008). Cathie White also states that although *His Greatness* was warmly received, attendance was not as expected (Cathie White 24 June 2008). This observation is reiterated in Birnie's review where he notices "very few people came" (Birnie, “Drama”). Cathie White states "We were disappointed in the audience we received for the show. We did not attract a significant number of our regular subscribers to this show" (Cathie White 24 June 2008). While many of Arts Club’s attendees use subscriptions to attend their plays, this portion of the tickets sold for *His Greatness* was less than the company’s average. Despite *His Greatness*’s generally good reviews, the play failed to achieve expected numbers of audience.

The core audience’s lack of attendance may be related to its demographics. Their average age maps towards the portion of the population that is statistically more adverse to an acceptance of gayness and gay equality. In a study six years before the show, Canadian Press/Leger Marketing "note[s] that the elderly are opposed in greater number to the granting of any . . . rights to homosexuals. Retired Canadians (27.2%). . . individuals of 65 years old or more (36.9%) disagree with the granting of same-sex rights in a higher proportion" ("Canadian Perceptions"). These opinions map across the spectrum and thus would suggest the Arts Club’s core average attendee (at age 55) would be more likely to disagree with same sex rights than a younger demographic. While these proportions have
changed considerably since this time, more contemporary studies still find the greatest opposition to gay inclusion among the oldest age bracket (Angus-Reid). These statistics indicate a pattern where acceptance of homosexuality is generally inversely correlated to the age of the person surveyed. However, numerous studies have also shown that homophobia is inversely related to both income and education, attributes in which the Arts Club’s well-heeled core audience scores highly (Koon 1; Herek, *Stigma* 16-17). Yet, Cathie White notes that while core audience attendance was not as expected, the show did bring in a number of audience members that were not regular attendees (this was determined by new entries into the theatre’s database). Cathie White believed that the audiences for *His Greatness* were noticeably more composed of gay men than their usual audience (Cathie White 28 June 2008). Of course, while summaries of ticket sales and demographics may inform of general trends, this information cannot be used to make definitive claims about how or why a show sells to a particular section of a market. Rather, these figures can only illuminate potential factors in audience preference which, in concert with other aspects, may have affected the show’s production.

**Summary and Conclusion**

The Vancouver Arts Club has established itself over its near half-century of existence at the top of the BC non-profit theatre market. In this position it maintains a certain set of expectations of professionalism and qualities in its productions that are matched to its relatively expensive ticket price, and its air of leisure and refinement. These ideals come together ultimately in creating a marketable, theatrical product, which is intended to sell at predictable levels, in order to maintain the enterprise. These ideals have been selected by a particular market demographic which wants the kind of theatrical
experience the Arts Club has traditionally mounted. This audience in turn, informs those theatrical experiences. *His Greatness* appears to fit with these expectations to a degree.

The play’s presentation of a theatrical imagining of one of the most renowned playwrights of the twentieth century is informed by its audiences’ familiarity with the canon to create a more sellable product. Susan Bennett notes “audiences are prepared to pay for (and indeed then expect) a special kind of theatrical event when icons of the profession are involved” (Bennett, *Theatre* 100). While she refers to plays featuring known actors or directors, utilising Williams as both a character and as the “author” of *His Greatness*’s central narrative likely offers a similar intrigue for an audience. As outlined earlier, the production’s advertising may also suggest that *His Greatness* is in fact a play by Williams. Bennett also states that intertextual productions that borrow from or relate to canonised texts work to “produce an internal horizon of expectations which will attract audience through challenging their own, already formed expectations/assumptions . . .” (Bennett, *Theatre* 120-121). One might presume that audiences bring “already formed expectations/assumptions” to *His Greatness*’s performance. The play’s critical reception, where most reviewers looked to connections between Williams and his art, appears to confirm that this occurred.

As a consumable product in the Vancouver Arts Club, *His Greatness* thus seems calculated to sell seats. However, given the iconic and canonical references in his text, MacIvor is coy about directly connecting Playwright to Williams. He instead allows an audience to infer details about Playwright’s life from their knowledge of a well-known figure, including some aspects of the character’s sexuality. The text’s references to sexuality also require the audience to make inferences from euphemisms. These
dramaturgical tactics make the gay themes of the play not fully visible, requiring an audience to fill in the gaps. This may be a way of insulating the audiences from what Clum refers to as “embodied homosexualities,” as such presences on stage may thwart sales with the Arts Club’s expected audience. The play’s material conditions of production may also serve to distance or insulate a potential audience from these “homosexualities”, while the theatre’s history and infrastructure create expectations that transgressive material, such as embodied homosexualities, will be controlled. Some of the theatre’s conditions of reception, its advertisements and program, further create expectations that the play will be about Williams. In this regard gay sexuality is entirely invisible, other than what viewers bring to mind from their knowledge of Williams’s biography. However, public reception in terms of reviews appears to conjoin the play’s inferences from Williams’s life directly onto Playwright’s character. In doing so, reviewers emphasise salacious notions of homosexuality, calling upon characterisations of the four Ds found in the theatre canon. These conditions all have the effect of marginalising the play’s central narrative concerning Playwright and Assistant’s relationship.

This relationship presents a cultural critique by making plain issues and difficult choices that gay men (and others) had to deal with in a historical era where their relationships were not recognised nor protected in the same ways that heterosexual marriages were. This critique has strong resonances with debates concerning same-sex marriage that had recently circulated through both the House of Parliament and in Canadian media (In 2007, two years after same-sex marriage was legalised, the subject still was the subject of much discourse in Canada. Over 2000 newspaper articles featured the topic in Canadian, English-language newspapers in 2007.) (“Canadian Newsstand” 29 Apr. 2013).
The Arts Club can be commended for programming a play with content that probes such ideas. However, the conditions of reception and production of the play appear to appeal to audience expectations of a product for consumption. For the Arts Club’s audience, this kind of product appears to mean that gay issues are overwhelmed by the focus on a historical biography. Thus, their production of *His Greatness* risks making some of the play’s gayness difficult to discern. Moreover, while the script’s instances of gay sexuality are already not fully available, the production further reduces their visibility. When references to gayness are discerned, they are often read as salacious and marginalised expressions of homosexuality, similar to historical presentations of the four Ds. This makes for a “total theatre experience” where the expression of gay sexuality is mostly unpronounced. Where its expression is noticed, gay sexuality is seen as marginalised. The fact that this occurs in a story about a failing gay relationship implies that the play’s depictions of homosexuality may not be particularly apt as product for consumption in this market.
Chapter Three: 'Alternative' Theatre, Alternative Sexualities

Michael Lewis MacLennan's *The Shooting Stage* opened at the Firehall Theatre in Vancouver's downtown east side on April 21st 2001. The play ran for three and a half weeks and was nominated for a Jessie Award as the best new play. An earlier script of the play also won the Herman Voaden Award for playwriting in 1999, and the published play was nominated for a Governor General's Award in 2002. MacLennan is an out, gay playwright and screenwriter from Vancouver. Much of his work contains gay themes. He wrote a number of award-winning plays in the nineties and earlier half of the early half of the first decade of the twenty-first century. However, in recent years he has focused primarily on writing for television. He is perhaps best well known as one of the main writers for the Canadian production of *Queer as Folk*.

*The Shooting Stage* features characters who present a broad range of constructions of homosexuality. These characters present male-male sex more overtly than do the characters in *His Greatness*. The characters’ presentation of male-male sexuality also appears to reference characterisations that historically have been used to code gay theatrical presences, including the figures of the four Ds and Wildean model. MacLennan's drama also critiques and disrupts the characterisations of gay men that the play overtly references in this fashion. The text creates various ambivalent and contradictory meanings that operate to question how gay men are perceived on stage and in real life. The material conditions of the play's performance add dimensions to the play's contrasting mixture of ideas. Some conditions underscore readings of the text’s characterisations while other conditions create contexts for audiences that promote understandings of social awareness and encourage cultural critique. Ultimately, the performance’s conditions of reception and production
allow for a broad scope of meanings, ranging from those that replay social constructions of homosexuals found in twentieth-century drama to some that show characters contesting the confines of those characterisations.

**Characters in the Text**

The text of MacLennan's play features three youths: Elliot, who is described as "slight" and sixteen, Ivan, also sixteen and with an "attractive, muscular body", and Derrick, a year older and "lean and tough" (MacLennan, *Shooting* 2). The play has two adult characters: Len, a photographer and Malcolm, a lawyer (2). For reasons of brevity I have chosen to examine the three central characters in the play, the protagonist Elliot, his childhood friend Ivan and his father, Malcolm.

Elliot is a gay, effeminate youth who explores cross-dressing. While the play borrows from the Wildean model in its drawing of his homosexual character as effeminate, MacLennan's dramaturgy complicates Elliot's effeminacy, suggesting that it is not a consequence of his same-sex desires, but of grief, social ostracism and confusion. The text further explicates social contexts of violence that arise from the conflation of effeminacy with homosexuality.

In the play's first scene, Elliot is seen "among racks of women's clothes . . . [where he] takes down a large feather boa and caresses it, burying his face into its feathers" (3). This moment codes two commonly-held perceptions of homosexuality, both of which signals effeminacy: an appreciation for aesthetics and feelings, and also a suggestion of cross-dressing. This portrayal references the Wildean model. Coming out of the Wilde trials, this model consolidated in the public imagination a particular physiognomy and character-type identified with homosexuals. Elliot's wearing of the exotic garment evokes
ideas of aestheticism, luxury and effeminacy associated with Wilde’s type (Sinfield, Wilde 118). The fact the boa is considered a women's garment adds to readings of effeminacy. It suggests cross-dressing, calling on “the modern stereotype of the gay man that he should want to dress as a woman” (Sinfield, Wilde 6).

Elliot is aware of his effeminacy and also a threat it poses to his well-being. Early in the play, he recites a speech he is to give at school about his favourite animal – a trumpeter swan – while wearing a boa made from the swan's feathers (MacLennan, Shooting 5). He edits his speech, consciously removing suggestive words such as "penetrating", "limp", "mating", to prepare for what he anticipates will be a hostile, homophobic reception from his classmates (6). His editing indicates an awareness of his effeminacy and its connection to being bullied. "Snickering can be heard from the other boys" offstage as he does this, and he comments as he edits, "don't give those maniacs an inch" (6). The scene then jumps to him meeting Derrick and Ivan in the school hall, who react to the speech. Elliot is violently bullied, called a "fag", and forced to portray himself as heterosexual by expressing a desire for his own sister (7-9). Alone and ostracised, Elliot later meets Ivan outside. Ivan shrugs off the previous bullying as "just joking", and suggests if Elliot acted "a little less... ", he would not suffer as much. Ivan warns him "the way you act, you set yourself up for this kind of thing" (17). When Elliot asks how he acts, Ivan replies "like a girl," framing a perception of Elliot as effeminate (17). While Elliot counters "well I'm not," the scenes make clear his effeminacy is both seen by others as a sign of homosexuality and a threat, through bullying, to his safety (17).

Elliot's effeminacy serves his internal, fantasy world. He imagines himself in a sequence where, in women's clothing, he is Miss Leda Swan, a famous performer on a talk
show. In an interview she reveals that Ivan is her new love interest. She talks of how she has known Ivan since kindergarten, and calls him a farm-boy, indicating that the persona of Ivan in the fantasy is the same youth that bullies him. Ivan proposes marriage to Leda in the fantasy and she accepts (28). The scene presents an exploration of both cross-dressing and initially suggests a transgendered identity. Furthermore the name Leda Swan references Greek mythology and its retelling in Yeats’s poem, “Leda and the Swan.” In these narratives Zeus comes to Leda as a swan and rapes her (Yeats 220). This reference also foreshadows the play’s sexual violence.

Elliot's presentation of Leda in his fantasy operates as a critique of gender constructions. Judith Butler suggests that drag disturbs ideas of fixity in gender and ultimately, by revealing the construction of gender, queries its naturalness through doubling, contradiction, and showing the imitative nature of gender itself (Butler, Gender 137). Elliot's staged fantasy, showing a male body performing female gender, can be read as undercutting fixity and naturalness found in normative gender construction. However, MacLennan's text also offers Elliot's fantasy performance as a reflection of his internal desires in sexual object choice, and not just an exploration of gender performance. His fantasy allows him to explore his feelings for Ivan outside the homophobic milieu of his everyday life. He creates an imaginary place where, as Leda, he and Ivan appear as a happy, heterosexual couple. In this regard Elliot's effeminacy (fantasized as being a woman) appears as a tool through which he can idealise and acquire his sexual object choice. Yet he does not fantasize that he and Ivan can love as two men, but rather appears to require an imitation of a heterosexual pairing. Elliot's drag can thus be seen as a critique of the sexual
politics of his environment, one where homosexuality is so violently policed against that he must imagine himself as another sex (and gender) in order to fantasize his desires.

When Elliot visits a drag club in a later scene, his cross-dressing takes on other meanings. His drag performance at this point suggests a need for some kind of missing parental presence in his life (his mother died recently and his connection to his father is remote) (MacLennan, *Shooting* 45). Through drag he appears to seek a connection to his lost mother’s femininity. When applying his make-up, he calls upon memories of his mother, remembering watching her use cosmetics "a hundred times." He recalls her as a woman of "glamour" and appears to want to imitate her gendered performance (44). He comments on how much he looks like her and then, in a moment of transference, he calls upon his favourite swan from a local bird sanctuary to help him gain confidence. The swan appears to meld with his mother as a parental source of guidance, beauty and inspiration. Her feather boa acts as a connection between her and the swan. The reader learns Elliot has made a deal with himself and the swan: "I told myself if you'd come back this year, it would prove... it would prove that I'd be okay" (44). Elliot's need of reassurance – to be "okay," to come to terms with his desires and his effeminacy, to be able to perform in drag – all appear to connect to his yearning for his mother/the swan to return. The text here frames his expression of effeminacy as a part of his grief for his mother and the loss of her glamour and femininity.

His effeminate performance has unexpected consequences which lead to an engagement in male-male sexuality. Ivan, while drunk, witnesses Elliot's drag and seeks him out after the performance. Elliot is embarrassed, but Ivan is aroused (46). He caresses Elliot's dress, and kisses him. Elliot goes to remove the dress and wig, but Ivan tells him
wearing it "is necessary" and they begin to "make out" (47). It appears that Ivan has internalised homophobia that requires that his coupling with Elliot to imitate a cross-gendered sexual liaison. Ivan's insistence that Elliot continue to wear a dress sets limits on how far their intimacy can be allowed to drift from its cover of heterosexuality. After Ivan "has an orgasm in Elliot's mouth", and his passion has waned, he "shoves Elliot away" (50). Outside the excitement of drunken sexual arousal, Ivan’s ability to tolerate this drift from heterosexuality becomes more restrictive, and he then leaves Elliot "alone, his mouth a smear of red" (50). When Elliot next meets Ivan, the latter is hostile, scorns Elliot’s effeminacy, and polices any expression of homosexuality. He rejects Elliot's approach, claims to be dating a girl, and then threatens to kill Elliot if he makes any mention of what happened (61-62). Accordingly, Elliot's experience of drag ultimately fails to be satisfactory. The scene presents how male effeminacy may create an avenue for a degree of same-sex passion, but also may thwart it as various heteronormative prohibitions come into play. Elliot also fails to recreate his mother's mystique, finding the atmosphere around his performance to be "hardly glamoursville" (43). These experiences appear to lead Elliot to question both his effeminate performance and whether he will "be okay".

The scene’s drag elements also may alter its reading by an audience. Elliot’s drag allows the scene to imitate a cross-gendered sexual liaison, where both participants appear, through their dress as being male and female. Given that neither participant disrobes, nor even removes a wig, the scene only has Elliot’s youthful, male body, covered by women’s clothes, to indicate that the image created by the scene is not a heterosexual act. Its overtness as an instance of male-male sexuality is thus in limited view.
In the play's penultimate scene, at the bird sanctuary, Ivan and Derrick’s bullying of Elliot becomes increasingly violent. Ivan threatens Elliot with a firearm and then ties him up. In desperation Elliot reveals the sexual engagement he had with Ivan to Derrick. Ivan reacts by demanding that Derrick kill Elliot's swan and tie its wings to Elliot, whom he orders to climb a tree and "fly" (83). Ivan shoots Elliot in the tree and, in a non-realistic moment, Elliot flies away.

The last scene of the play shows Elliot at his father's funeral, taking pictures. Stage directions indicate he has "changed, matured, his youthful effeminate manners gone" (88). In a conversation with Len, they talk about the swan at the sanctuary. Len suggests it "got lost," but then is corrected when Elliot suggests that it got "left behind" instead. Elliot tells of how Ivan is now going to jail, and is considered a "freak." Elliot indicates that he is now going to "be fine," and become a photographer.

This scene proposes that through his loss of the swan (as a surrogate for his mother), Elliot's effeminacy has disappeared and he has now "matured" normally (88). In the scene's directions his effeminacy is conflated with youth, suggesting it was the result of a kind of immaturity. His obsession with his mother and her ephemera suggests this immaturity came out of a failure to process her death and progress through grieving (88). The phrase "left behind" supports this reading by reasserting Elliot's connection to his mother/the swan has been left in his youth, and he has now become an adult. The perception of Ivan as a "freak" contrasts directly to the "changed, matured" Elliot. The contrast presents Elliot as no longer being seen as the Other, as he now appears at peace with his public presentation.

MacLennan’s construction of Elliot appears to borrow from the Wildean model by creating a homosexual youth who is overtly effeminate. This effeminacy is accompanied by
experiments in cross-dressing, where Elliot seeks a connection to his mother, and explores a fantasy involving his sexual desires. MacLennan's text critiques contemporary culture by showing the reader the social consequences of these non-heteronormative behaviours. Effeminacy and cross-dressing are separate, but related, constructions of homosexuality which both serve to align their subject with women and women's position of power in a heteronormative scheme. Sinfield writes that such a schema, which polices expression of gender with an "expectation that sexualities must be comprised within and defined through some version of a masculine/feminine binary structure," is both "untenable and intolerable" (Wilde 47). Altman offers reasons for such policing. He observes "as long as society is based on competitiveness and sexual oppression there will be a need to demarcate it into categories, to maintain socially induced repressions by stigmatising heavily all those that fall outside the norm" (qtd. in Sinfield, Cultural 58). Altman's claim that such repressions are inherent in competitive cultures suggests a relationship between such repression and capitalist values (as capitalism enshrines competition) (Stigler). Elliot's narrative exemplifies these notions. As his expression of gender is perceived outside heteronormativity's confines, he is bullied by those who attempt to contain his expression. While MacLennan's text replays the associations of the Wildean model, it also disrupts them by alluding to sources of Elliot's effeminacy other than his homosexuality. MacLennan’s text also illustrates the repression and violence that can result from reading sexual preference as a physical/behavioural type.

MacLennan's portrayal of Elliot's bullying asks a reader to observe a common occurrence where non-conventional expressions of gender are policed in contemporary culture. The text not only illuminates the suffering endured by gay youth, particularly those
who are effeminate, but illustrates the impact of this oppression in formative years.

MacLennan represents the urge to patrol and contain non-normative expressions of gender are already an aspect of the socialisation of the youths, thereby drawing attention to the pervasiveness of these attitudes in society.

After Elliot is shot and flies away he is next seen as transformed, “his youthful effeminate manners gone” (MacLennan, Shooting 88). This change suggests that effeminacy may be a temporary phase of identity from which an individual might emerge. Yet this may not always be possible. Numerous men and boys have been unable to alter the way they are perceived and have suffered from those that are threatened by deviations from the heteronormative scheme. It should be noted that enforced regimens for altering perceived excesses of effeminacy in males have been considered dangerous, or ineffective (Pan-American Health Organization; LaScala). In the last decade discourses regarding bullying appear to have shifted focus from those perceived as different (often as effeminate) to those who are the perceivers of such differences. MacLennan's text shows the social costs of rigorous policing of gender representation, and critiques the bullies' antipathy to male effeminacy by showing its subscribers as "freaks," criminals, or themselves victims of abuse, it also conveniently makes male effeminacy disappear at the play's end, (MacLennan, Shooting 88). While Elliot is now "fine" because he is no longer effeminate, would others expressing a similar degree of effeminacy still be in danger, and if so, how might they be able to change to their way they are perceived (90)?

Butler and others assert that gender representations are inherently performative, and thus constructed. However, effeminacy in males can be considered not of one's own construction but rather a result of how society constructs a sexual Other (Butler, Gender
25). Sinfield writes that "subordinated groups do not control their own representations" and thus the ability for a subject to change from being perceived as effeminate is not always under the subject's control (Sinfield, Wilde 46). Contemporary and historical theatre has numerous narratives in which men attempt to control to little or no avail, perceptions that they are effeminate (such as in Tea and Sympathy, or The Birdcage). Elliot's editing of his speech on swans illustrates his inability to change others' perception of him, as he is sexually harassed immediately after its delivery. In earlier drafts of the play, Elliot desperately tries to eradicate signs of his effeminacy (MacLennan, Shooting 30 March 1997 Draft 30). Even for males who can control their public perception to minimise a suggestion of effeminacy, such behaviours can be considered as enforced and falsifying an individual's natural way of being. This resonates with gay men returning to, or being forced to stay in, the closet. Such behaviors have long been considered damaging to an individual's psychological well-being (Adams 238). Elliot's sexual preference is not made available to a reader at play's end, but I contend that most readers would not presume it to have changed because most Canadians believe homosexuality is an in-born part of a person's character (Angus-Reid). When Elliot ceases to be effeminate, he appears closer to a heteronormative alignment between gender performance and biological sex which seems to signify what, in his own words, it means to be "fine" (MacLennan, Shooting 90). While the play partially disengages effeminacy from homosexuality, and thus proposes that homosexuality is "fine," The Shooting Stage offers a problematic depiction of effeminacy. It presents it as the impetus for Elliot's torment, and replays heteronormative constructs of power where gendered performances that deviate from a masculine primacy are controlled violently. While the text shows how non-normative expressions of gender can evoke homophobic
violence, and allows for a critique of that violence, it also makes effeminacy disappear by the play's conclusion. To a reader that has suffered under the policing of gender norms, a text that exposes such suffering may be a welcome work. Elliot’s ability to alter his perceived effeminacy may not be as welcomed by the same reader if he or she is unable to make the same kind of change.

Ivan is closeted. His masculine behaviours reveal conflicts in social constructions of homosexuality. His portrayal makes connections between aspects of the four Ds and his homosexuality but also offers alternate understandings to his behaviour. As he appears to actively engage his sexuality however, he also polices others’ perception of that sexuality. Ivan performs masculinity through a variety of gestures and expressions of power. He repeatedly approaches homoerotic experience but each instance's outcome is predicated on his control of how he is perceived, and that perception's relation to masculine power. When this control is threatened he responds with violence and behaviours that appear to reassert his agency by policing the masculinity around him. Ivan ultimately fails to be comfortably both masculine and homosexual. His conflict creates perceptions that he is dangerous and perhaps mentally troubled. However, his performance also illustrates difficulties of simultaneously being both masculine and homosexual, which at times appear as mutually exclusive.

In Ivan's first scene he caresses Elliot's boa, asking if it belongs to his sister. Ivan comments on her attractiveness and asks Elliot "what kind of guy wouldn't want to [have sex with Elliot's sister]?" (MacLennan, Shooting 8). When Elliot suggests that incest might be normal on a farm, where Ivan lives, he threatens to "piledrive" Elliot's head (7). Their interplay thus shifts from a tenuous mutual baiting, to Elliot being victimised. Derrick then
assaults Elliot, while Ivan tells him to just admit he is attracted to his sister. Ivan then suggests that Elliot "doesn't like girls" (8). The scene shows Ivan attempting to force others around him to assert heterosexual identities; however his own display of heterosexuality appears somewhat too strident, as he crosses familial boundaries by objectifying Elliot's sister and suggesting her allure provokes an incestuous response in her brother. Elliot's retort challenges Ivan's performance of heterosexual lust by equating it to sexual deviance associated with locales on the fringes of law and social propriety which provokes Ivan's violent threat and an accusation that Elliot is homosexual.

The reader learns of Elliot's long-term friendship with Ivan when he attempts to mend this relationship after the previous encounter. He explains his problem with Elliot "acting like a girl" and his inability to defend him anymore. Ivan tries to contextualise the bullying as "goofing off." This repeats his earlier defense of bullying as "just joking" and evokes certain practices of heteronormativity, where men are expected to take rough treatment as a way of ensuring appropriate masculinity. Phillips sums up these behaviours, in that "practices of heterosexuality, homophobia, athleticism, economic privilege, toughness, and violence provide pathways toward achieving and/or maintaining status as the hegemonic masculine norm in adolescence" (219). Miedzian focuses closely on this concept, writing "everywhere there is homophobia, there is the fear that if we don't raise boys to be tough or tearless, they will be gay . . ." (299). Ivan's complicity in bullying appears to be an attempt to coerce Elliot through violence to contain his “appearance” and become more traditionally masculine.

Ivan’s own approaches to same-sex desire are thwarted by his drive to contain behaviours that may be seen as un-masculine. When Ivan is shown lifting weights with
Derrick, both youths are conscious of their bodies. As they discuss secondary sexual characteristics, overtones of homoeroticism circulate through their comments. They compare their muscles, abilities and body hair (MacLennan, *Shooting* 39). Ivan asks if Derrick wants to shave his legs, and Derrick looks to this as a gay accusation. He calls Ivan a "fag" and tries to dissociate hairlessness from sexual orientation: "Body builders shave their legs. 'N cyclists, doesn't mean they're fags" (39). The discussion's homoerotic potential is consistently contained by both youths as they label each other as gay with pejoratives. Through this labelling they disparage homosexuality and compete for dominance. When Ivan then states he wants to become a model, acknowledging and objectifying the homoerotic potential of his body, Derrick suggests modeling is "queer" (41). Ivan responds by again threatening Derrick with violence. Their potential homoeroticism is triggered by their masculinity, which also then evokes homophobic responses and violence, nullifying the initial homoerotic potential.

More nuances of Ivan's masculinity and its connection to his homosexuality become apparent when Ivan arranges a photo shoot with Len. Ivan asks about his own attractiveness, and when Len reassures him "*IVAN begins to relax and become increasingly flirtatious with the camera*" (MacLennan, *Shooting* 53). He talks of his physique suggesting it is a consequence of his strenuous farm work. He then suggests doing underwear ads, as Len takes photos. Ivan proceeds to take off his shirt off but is embarrassed by his body odour. Len comments that working men are supposed to smell a certain way, and that he thinks "it's fine" (55). Len comments on Ivan’s sexual allure, suggesting he must have a lot of girlfriends. Ivan suggests that Len has boyfriends, but Len denies this. Ivan appears to be aware of his own sexual allure, and uses his power to control the scene by taking his pants
off. A knock comes to the door; Ivan thinks it is the police, panics and flees. When Len keeps taking pictures, recording Ivan's panic, Ivan labels him a "freak" and a "faggot" before escaping through a fire exit (57). The scene reveals Ivan's awareness and exploration of his own homoerotic potential. When in control of Len, Ivan expresses a homoerotic self. Yet when he is threatened by the loss of control over how he is perceived, and by a public perception of his homosexuality he protects himself by sanctioning heteronormativity by expressing homophobia. Ivan’s perceptions of masculinity are also revealed when he discusses slaughtering pigs, which he must do “[c]ause I'm the son” (38). His comment indicates a familial construction of masculinity where animal slaughter is seen as an initiation into manhood. Miedzian writes that in some cultures a boy’s first kill “is a big deal . . . something . . . approaching manhood” (Miedzian 87). The ability to slaughter implies that a boy has reached a level of control and can kill without emotional consequences. Ivan kills, but is aware of his emotions, as he discusses the ways in which he banishes his own sensitivities, by not looking in the pig’s eyes, and just seeing an object, a pig, and not a living creature (39). His discussion indicates that he is of two minds about the task and its initiation of him into manhood may be untenable. The scene indicates both the expectations and difficulties Ivan has in his performance of masculinity.

Ivan's negotiation with homosexuality appears to be predicated on how he is perceived. When he is in control, is reassured that he smells "like a man," lifts weights, or is admired for a well-defined musculature that has potential to get "lots of girlfriends," his sexuality seems positioned to a masculine norm. It is in these very moments that he seems able to explore a degree of homoeroticism. His sexual encounter with Elliot can only happen when Elliot wears the wig and dress, allowing a simulation of heterosexuality.
When Ivan is threatened with exposure of his homoerotic urges, or when he doesn’t have full agency in his exchanges (as with Derrick, and ultimately with Elliot), he lashes out with homophobic epithets or violence. In this regard his character references a familiar complex where homophobia "may . . . be rooted in repressed desire" (Dollimore, “Homophobia” 10).

Various studies have located individual’s homophobia as coming out of a repressed gay identity. In psychological study, this behaviour is referred to as "complementary projection" (Blumenfeld 228). These texts propose that violent homophobia is found in homosexuals themselves and their policing of gay expressions keeps accusations from landing on them. It is the individual's own unacceptable feelings towards himself lies at the root of his violence; as "such aggression serves to cleanse a person of [his] undesirable trait" (228). This notion may explain Ivan’s behaviour. His homophobia not only indicates the force of the dominant ideology of heteronormativity which powerfully defines sex and gender roles, but his adherence to its codes of representation and behaviour make his own sexual orientation conflict with his ideal of himself.

Ivan's internal conflict and his expressed violence are also suggestive of the four Ds, where homosexuals were historically portrayed on stages as both "dangerous" and "demented." Ivan's inability to negotiate his own homosexuality leads to progressively violent exchanges, ending with Elliot being shot. His predilection towards violence, combined with his ease with killing pigs and birds, allows a reader to see him as a psychopath, thereby replaying a theatrical characterisation of pathologising gay men as inherently psychologically damaged. Reading Ivan in this way allows the audience to see the character's bullying not as "goofing off" or "having a little fun" as Ivan justifies it, but
rather part of a trajectory of dangerous anti-social behaviour. This trajectory would likely lead the audience to make connections between bullying and anti-social behaviour.

Ivan's dilemma between expressing his homosexual urges and maintaining a traditional masculinity theatricalises a supposed incompatibility between the two ideas, and in doing so replays the heteronormative values which demarcate masculinity as separate from and incompatible with homosexuality in defined gender roles as expressed by various theorists of gender and sexuality (Butler, *Bodies* 293; Dreyer 6). Yet his character also challenges these roles by showing both violence and damage arising from their enforcement, allowing a reader to evaluate the consequences of tightly controlled social norms. His portrayal also replays the characterisations of the four Ds which present him as both dangerously anti-social and mentally unwell. The text suggests causes for these attributes other than those originating from a homosexual identity: Heavily controlled cultures of masculinity can normalize expressions of violence and killing; the text allows Ivan’s familial, masculine responsibility to slaughter pigs to be seen as an origin of his violence. The play also reminds a reader of the normalisation of anti-gay violence in youth culture – as “goofing around.” Ivan’s apparent mental instability may be symptomatic of the untenability of his own same-sex desires within his cultural, homophobic milieu. That is, his mental state may not be understood as a condition of those desires, but rather the result of a social enculturation of antipathy towards his own feelings.

Malcolm's homosexuality is the most active and overt of the play’s characters. His sexuality is associated with criminal and psycho-pathological behaviours concerning the abuse of minors, including child pornography. For a brief period, he experiments with cross-dressing. These connections replay elements of the four Ds found in twentieth-
century gay theatrical representations, and these may contribute to perpetuating out-dated understandings concerning homosexuality. These associations allow a reading of Malcolm’s abusive behaviour as a disease, one that he acquired as a presumably defenseless youth, and one that he consciously attempts to treat. However, this perception of disease maps onto the play's characterisations of same-sex desire, and may suggest homosexuality itself is a contagion. While these motifs do not reflect contemporary legal, medical or even academic understandings of homosexuality, they do underscore some widely held understandings concerning homosexuality that still circulate in contemporary Canadian society.

Twice during the play, Malcolm seeks out Derrick at a video gallery. Malcolm then pays Derrick to endure a violent sexual encounter. Malcolm describes their first tryst: “I grab his flimsy arm . . . and I deliver a blow to his soft belly, send him bent over now. I strike that body maybe five times, he’s on the ground, and that’s it, enough is enough” (MacLennan, Shooting 84). Derrick adds to their sexual and potentially abusive interaction by selling Malcolm an undeveloped roll of pornographic film he has taken (31). The pictures show a Derrick as a "hurt kid" (48). They arrange that Derrick will shoot and sell more films to Malcolm in future. Malcolm then brings the film to Len and asks him to develop the photos. Malcolm's mind-set and his values are indicated in this scene. Though a lawyer, charged to uphold the law, he not only sexually engages a seventeen-year-old (which, due to his position of power, is illegal), but also violently (Department). He pays Derrick for this abuse, which further implicates him in child prostitution. He also becomes complicit in generating child pornography and furthermore implicates his friend Len in its production. His ethical position becomes clear in a monologue where he discusses trying to
bond with Elliot, his son: “I try and teach him—don’t steal, don’t lie, help people when you can. Stuff a father should pass on to his son, help him become a man. Only thing is, I don’t believe that stuff myself. It never worked for me” (MacLennan, *Shooting* 45).

Len prints the photos and confronts Malcolm about their content, who defends his actions saying "I didn't take them" (47). Len counters that Malcolm bought them, to which he replies that is "hardly the same thing" (47). This is not exactly true because according to the Criminal Code of Canada, his possession, and part in the generation of the photos are an equal part of the crime.

The text presents Malcolm's sexual activity as criminal in its involvement in child pornography, sex with a minor, physical assault, and prostitution. Not only does this replay marginalising strategies of theatrically representing homosexuals as dangerous characters, but Malcolm’s lack of belief in ethical social codes are indicative of a kind of a mental or social unwellness – corresponding to the "demented" parameter of the four Ds. Furthermore, Malcolm kills himself by the play's end, adding "doomed" to the list of these gay theatrical characterisations that his character replays (91).

Yet Malcolm's character is more complex than these actions suggest. Malcolm claims to be "wounded" as he was continually sexually abused by "the old man" – the producer on television series Malcolm played in – as a youth (48-9). Len also suffered the same abuse, but was able to stop being victimised. Malcolm was unable to end his abuse, and admits he "liked it" (74). His history, being abused and then further abusing Derrick, recalls a contagion model, as is part of the disease depiction of the four Ds. In Malcolm’s history, abuse and same sex behaviours are expressed together, and seem to be passed along from one generation to another. He appears to want to change things. In a scene in
Malcolm’s dead wife's closet, he caresses her clothes and talks to her about taking the knife away from Derrick.

MALCOLM. I nearly shoved it in the kid last night. There was a moment before I looked into his eyes when it would have been so easy, Heather. Just slide it in. He’d have let me. It’s getting way out of hand. I may have strayed before, but you kept me in line. The past weeks, I just keep pushing. Pushing him to do something. Fight back, hit me, tell on me. Something. Anything to stop me. Ruin me. If you were still here, this would never have gone so far. *(He inhales the smell of a dress.)* Oh Heather. Stop me (66).

The speech shows Malcolm’s dangerous state of mind. It suggests that Malcolm wants to stop his criminal sexuality, before it escalates to homicide, which he plainly contemplates. While this revelation extends the criminal (or dangerous) element associated with his sexuality, it also offers another nuance. While Malcolm mentions that he was unable to stop his own abuse, he also appears to want to stop the cycle and to cease victimizing others as he was victimized. If one accepts the notion that Malcolm's criminal abuse comes out of a form of disease, the text also appears to show that Malcolm wishes the disease could cease, regardless of the costs to him. His apparent suicide at the play's end supports the idea that he yearned for and ultimately was able, to control his impulses.

A contagion model, in terms of abuse, is well documented medically. In Glasser *et al*, such narratives are shown to be well grounded in statistics. Their study links perpetrators of sexual abuse and incest as having themselves been victims of sexual abuse (Glasser *et al* 485). MacLennan’s text shows abusive sex between a man in a position of influence and a
minor of the same sex. The same-sex aspect of this liaison connects homosexuality with the sexual abuse of minors which is a criminal act. This connection replays misunderstandings in the public sphere and may support the widely held notion that homosexuals are sexually attracted, and thus dangerous, to youths and children (Herek, *Stigma* 8-9). However, a number of studies challenge this notion. Groth and Birnbaum state "Homosexuality and homosexual paedophilia are not synonymous. In fact, it may be that these two orientations are mutually exclusive" (136). For this reason Herek states "it is preferable to refer to men's sexual abuse of boys with the more accurate label of *male-male* molestation" rather than use the word homosexual (Herek, "Facts" 1). Malcolm appears to have what the American Psychiatric Association's DSM-5 draft would consider a paraphilic disorder, and not a homosexual orientation (DSM-5). While there are clear distinctions between such a paraphilia and homosexuality, these may not be understood widely by the public, as Herek makes clear (7-8). As such MacLennan’s narrative creates a space where these conflicting ideas may be explored.

Malcolm's sexual behaviour creates connections between male-male sex acts, and criminal and psychopathological behaviours concerning minor abuse. It also replays a common theme that those that experience same-sex behaviour are doomed. Nevertheless, MacLennan’s text allows a reader to perceive Malcolm's behaviour as a disease which he presumably acquired as a defenseless youth himself, and with which he consciously battles. This metaphor of disease circulates throughout the play and appears to be transferred between generations. These connections recall motifs found in twentieth century gay theatrical representations which perpetuate false understandings concerning homosexuality. While these motifs no longer reflect the legal, medical or even academic understandings of
homosexuality, they do underscore some socially held notions that still circulate and contribute to contemporary Canadian values concerning homosexuality.

*The Shooting Stage* shows characters overtly engaging in male-male sexual behaviours. It furthermore has passages where male-male sexual engagements are described, and where homoeroticism is suggested. The play’s characters replay a number of characterisations and narratives that have historically been used to reflect public perceptions of homosexuals. These include the Wildean model and the four Ds. Ivan and Malcolm’s various acts of same-sex attraction are associated with their engagement in acts of violence (and can be seen as dangerous). Malcolm’s relationship with Derrick suggests notions of a disease model where their sexuality, associated with violence, is passed across a generation. Ivan and Malcolm are both tormented by their inability to come to terms with their sexual wants and become unstable mentally, suggesting the “demented” parameter.

However the text also disrupts the Wildean model by delinking Elliot’s homosexuality with his effeminacy, showing his performance of gender to be mutable. The text also illustrates how violence is naturalized in the youths’ policing of gender norms, and how its association with homosexuality may have roots in some gay men’s self-regimentation in a homophobic culture. Finally, Malcolm’s abusive engagement with Derrick causes slippage between the historical narrative of disease ascribed to homosexuality and the disease-like aspect of sexual abuse that is seen when abuse transfers between generations.

Some of these characterisations are seen when the character’s sexual desires are overtly expressed, and they actively engage in male-male sex. Thus their active sexuality may also reaffirm to a reader some historical notions of homosexuality. With further analysis however, the text disrupts or questions some of these characterisations, in ways
that modify or refute their standing. Through this interrogation The Shooting Stage thus has the potential to address some understandings of homosexuality.

**Conditions of Production: Dramaturgical Development**

The Shooting Stage’s path to production included several dramaturgical workshops which shaped the play's gay contents and meanings. The play was initially workshopped by the Playwrights Theatre Centre in Vancouver. MacLennan then won the Herman Voaden Playwriting Prize which included a workshop and performance of the script. Throughout the course of this development, MacLennan notes that gay material in the play was "stepped away from" (MacLennan “Drafts”). He writes about the Herman Voaden session: “In those drafts, I believe that there was more of a gay vibe between the two men, something that definitely got stepped away from. For example, by my remembrance, Len wasn't asexual in these early drafts, but a wholly gay man” (MacLennan “Drafts”). After this session the play received two workshops at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre and one in conjunction with the Shaw Festival. The play then went on to further changes at the Factory Theatre and then again in leading up to production at the Firehall. These workshops and sessions were supported by the BC Arts Council, Vancouver Office of Cultural Affairs, the Canada Council, the Ontario Arts Council, and The Toronto Arts Council (MacLennan “Drafts”). Any relationship between the reception of these monies and the play’s ultimate presentation as product are likely similar to those discussed in Chapter Two. The nature of the product likely differs in this regard, due to the play’s ultimate production at the Firehall.

MacLennan notes that the workshops he engaged in changed the play’s gay material:
One of the things [that dramaturgs mentioned] was the sense that, really, could all these five men be GAY? It was too big. (This especially came about through the Buddies process, ironically) . . . I know there were notes around things like the locker room scene, or the weight-lifting scene, how these places could feel gratuitous. I sincerely didn't feel that was the case, and while I know I made changes to the events, I never fully softened them. I remember explaining that I was interested in "unpacking" some traditional gay erotic scenarios (i.e. the sort of things you might find in porn narratives) and showing them in a different light (i.e. not sexy, even if they're charged with eros.) This freaked some people out. (MacLennan “Drafts”)

MacLennan makes clear that some of the gay material was contentious with those who were involved with the development of the script. The question of whether all five men could be gay speaks to the visibility of gay characters on Canadian stages. A play's dramatis persona is obviously dictated by its writer's imagination. Efforts to change these characters' sexual orientation suggests a discomfort with prevalence of gay characters in the play, or perhaps a disbelief in the chances of five gay men happening to interact in a naturalist setting that presents itself as a reflection of contemporary society. MacLennan acknowledges he expected discomfort with the play's gay themes, saying he worked hard on narrative structures "as ballast against any queasy feelings that my characters or themes might engender" . . . "something that might be ‘difficult’ for some audiences" (MacLennan “Drafts”). The playwright makes clear that an audience may experience "queasy feelings" from his "characters or themes." The problems of receiving this kind of material are further
underscored in his personal reception by some of his co-workers in the development process. MacLennan found his own life (which will again be queried in Birnie's review below) coming under scrutiny as a kind of slippage occurred between his characters and himself:

. . . I often had to somehow defend the ideas of the play by explaining that I myself had neither had any kind of precocious sexual activity, or any desire for young men. It was really more of an attempt to find a narrative that could amplify the themes, which I basically discuss in the book's introduction. But the mention of my own (lack of) life experiences was somehow a relief for people. I was gay, but I wasn't "fucked up," you know? (MacLennan “Drafts”)

MacLennan’s comments appear to highlight and acknowledge uneasiness towards staging gay and sexually deviant material. The questioning of his personal life seems to indicate a need in his co-workers to ensure his work is fiction. MacLennan's defense of his own personal life story appears to indicate how marginalised and foreign gay material is to the theatrical institutions developing his work. The situation also speaks to a readiness of his co-workers to presume that gay writers write primarily from experience, rather than their imagination or from research. Their presumption that MacLennan wrote from experience could also infer MacLennan’s’s gay identity is comprised of aspects of the four Ds seen in the play. MacLennan's comments concerning "traditional gay erotic scenarios" and their being considered gratuitous also indicates discomfort in his dramaturgs' reception of the play’s themes. This may indicate an unwillingness to show "traditional" aspects of gay eroticism, or may reflect problems in staging these aspects in conjunction with the
play’s negative gay characterisations (portrayed as, for example, criminal, dangerous, or mentally ill).

As discussed in Chapter Two, most script development takes into account the financial considerations of the play's potential production. MacLennan's co-developers’ seeming discomfort with various gay presences and their prevalence in The Shooting Stage could be indications of what MacLennan himself recognises as audience "queasiness." This queasiness could be considered as counter-productive to the play's gaining audience and generating revenue. However, most of the developing institutions are at some distance from mainstream production, and have a history of taking more risks than regional theatres do. The risk-taking of creating discomforting theatre may be considered financially worthwhile if a prospective audience is drawn in by the play's social critique, counter-balancing the potential loss to such discomfort. Considerations such as these are commonly made when theatres program their seasons. The development of the play indicates some movement towards restricting and shaping gay presences in the script, even though the organisations sponsoring the development of the play appear to be politically neutral or liberal (as judged by their past repertoire). The Herman Voaden Prize is a national playwriting competition, supported by Queen's University and Voaden’s estate. The prize places no criteria on subject matter, other than its intentions to "develop a distinctively Canadian art of the theatre; to encourage the writing of Canadian drama" (“2011”). Both the Firehall and Factory theatre are dedicated to developing Canadian plays, and have histories of playing socially interventionist work. Buddies in Bad Times is a long-established queer theatre, and in the past has predominantly staged transgressive, challenging theatre. The final script of The Shooting Stage contains much material that could cause audience discomfort, but also
may unpack the source of discomfort and challenge its audiences with its social critique. The script's development presumably arrived at a balance between these qualities (of interest in critique and of discomfort) where its author and producers deemed it was worthy of production.

MacLennan further comments on audience discomfort, or "squeamishness" when he discusses the play's sex scene (MacLennan, “One”). While sex is obliquely referenced throughout the script, Ivan and Elliot's scene of fellatio presents a performance of a homosexual act on stage. The scene was directed in such a way that focused more on Ivan’s reaction as the passive partner, rather than the sex act itself. Through the use of lighting and blocking the sex act was contained. MacLennan recalls:

. . . Ivan was facing downstage, Elliot on his knees facing upstage (thus masking Ivan's crotch with his head). Our focus (in blocking and lighting) was on Ivan's face as he was receiving the blow job. When Ivan then panics and leaves, we then see Elliot turn, his face smeared, and finish the scene with an emotional beat for him. However, when the actual sex was happening, I believe it was more about Ivan . . . With the exception of the use of lighting (putting the focus primarily on Ivan's face) the sex itself wasn't particularly stylized. We went for realism, however brief (boys will be boys). (MacLennan, “One”)

The scene was given much consideration in terms of audience reaction. MacLennan continues:

Staging the sex was of course a big area of discussion. Nobody wanted it to feel gratuitous, and perhaps because of where it happened in the story, we
never had push-back (the play was not at a "gay" theatre) though it must have been a bit challenging for audiences. I recall that a big part of the goal of the play, which was supported by the direction, was in drawing audiences into a compelling narrative . . . that would then enable a potentially squeamish audience to weather any moments or images that they might find challenging. (MacLennan, “One”)

The acknowledgement of the sex scene’s “challenge” for audiences indicates an understanding of the issues surrounding “embodied homosexualit[ies]” discussed in Chapter Two (Clum, Still 13). The scene’s presentation, in both its placement within the narrative (at the end of the first act) and its theatricalisation (where lighting, blocking and timing de-emphasised the sexual contact) appears to be calculated to contain some of the scene’s sex and not alienate some of its audience members (13). Simultaneously, the “embodied homosexuality” of the scene of fellatio may also be affirming to gay constituents in the audience.

**Theatre Company**

On its webpage, the Firehall Society advertises its multicultural interests, asserting its broad base of performance styles from culturally diverse artists. This mandate is reflected in the theatre's wide renown as a place to see Asian Canadian performance (“Multicultural”). The theatre labels its fare as “Firehall entertainment”. The Society's contextualising of its presentations as “entertainment” may contain and shape the available meanings about the theatre’s fare to a viewer. Theatrical pieces that probe cultures of violence or are social critiques of contemporary culture may not be considered “entertaining” for viewers. Audience members may well be moved and interested in the
ideas that such plays present, but to classify them as entertainment can suggest an experience of an agreeable emotional journey. The intentions of some productions may be to disturb audience complacency and this may involve an experience that cannot be considered necessarily as agreeable. The theatre’s self-description is likely an attempt to secure attendance, as identifying difficult subject material and provocative work as such may turn away potential theatre goers looking for a purely agreeable experience.

The Firehall Theatre received funding from all three tiers of government for its 2001 season: $88,500 federally ($58,500 for theatre, $30,000 for dance); $35,280 provincially; and $54,500 (39,000 for theatre, 8,500 for dance, $7,000 for artist in residence) municipally (Canada, “Searchable 2001”; BC Arts, 2001; “Annual” 7, 15). These monies are in the range of that received by many other “alternative” theatres in Canada. The theatre is also supported by a number of arm’s length government entities (BC Hydro, BC Tourism, BC Spirit Festivals, Canadian Heritage), private corporations, including *The Vancouver Sun* and Telus, and also private, benevolent associations. The theatre itself is also owned by the city and is used by the society rent-free (“Support Us”). The supporting private corporations are of interest in that neither of them is particularly associated with an economic class of viewer, whereas those supporting *His Greatness* would be considered as serving the upper middle class. The Firehall Theatre’s total funding monies for 2001 comprise only a fraction of the Arts Club’s funding for the same year.

The level of funding the theatre receives may affect certain conditions of production. Like the Arts Club, the Firehall is also a member of PACT, and with its own productions, employs Equity actors. The theatre also rents its spaces for numerous other performances not considered part of its seasons. These productions do not necessarily
operate under the various Equity rules, but do often hire the house’s technical crew (if needed). The theatre is not an IATSE house (where all house tech workers must be union staff or union trainees), although it has a regular, waged staff of formally trained workers, some of who are members of their union (Burns). The Shooting Stage’s creative personnel were all professionals or professionals in training. The cast required three young actors to play the play's youths, and these actors were all recent or soon-to-be graduates of Studio 58, a local, recognised conservatory theatre school at Langara College (Program, Shooting). The students there are trained using classical, as well as Stanislavski System/American Method derived teachings. The latter teachings lead to “realist” portrayals of characters by actors. These two approaches are staples of most acting conservatories in North America.

The theatre’s level of funding may affect aspects of production. The set’s non-realistic design and relatively simple construction may not only reflect a distancing from naturalism, but may also result from economic concerns. The set would require much less money to construct than would, for example, His Greatness’s fully realised hotel room. As theatrical production gains distance from mainstream production (and funding), a break from naturalism and its use of fully reproduced environments may be informed by economic necessities.

**Conditions of Reception: Advertising and Public Media**

The Firehall Arts Centre produced a central image for its print and electronic media promotion of The Shooting Stage. This graphic consists of two photographs by Daniel Collins superimposed into a single image; the larger outer image consists of the front face of a vertical focus camera and the smaller image of actor Clarence Sponagle playing Elliot reflected in the camera’s lens. The image of Sponagle is created in such a way that it
reflects certain ideas in the text, while also simultaneously disrupting them. The image shows the actor facing the camera barefoot and wearing a black evening dress. The dress has a spaghetti-strap falling off of one shoulder. The actor’s hair is medium length and is androgynous in style. The actor’s frame however, is clearly male and his broad shoulders, flat chest and muscular, hairy legs make his biological sex immediately apparent. The conflict between his male physique and the female-gendered garment draws a viewer’s attention to its non-heteronormative gendering, and invites a viewer to assume the play features this kind of gendering. The image also evokes youth. The actor’s pose has his hands twisted in a display that strongly suggests a child’s gesture. The gesture is one of perhaps bewilderment, or powerlessness. This evocation of a juvenile’s pose accentuates the already transgressive aspect of a dress on a male figure, suggesting an aspect of under-age sexuality in the image. This association is underscored by the one strap being off his shoulder, a partial state of undress which is packed with associations of seduction and sexuality. To the viewer, this combination of youth, sexuality, and cross-dressing all create expectations of the play’s themes.

These themes are given further meanings through their spatial containment within the camera’s lens. The camera introduces ideas of voyeurism and, in the context of the actor’s presentation, child-pornography. Sponagle’s juvenile pose, innocent expression and his cross-dressed costume suggest the figure as a subject in some photographed construct beyond the character’s understanding. The elaborate, top-reflex style of camera suggests the photography is professional. These combined elements construct audience expectations that the play will include themes that not only disrupt heteronormative conventions, but also may deal with taboos concerning under-age sex and pornography. The image is also
somewhat reminiscent of the bull’s eye seen in opening sequences of the James Bond films. This aspect underscores ideas of shooting and targeting, which feature in the play’s theme of bullying.

The play’s name is featured predominantly across the top of the poster, and its ambivalent meanings work with the image to suggest and extend its themes. *The Shooting Stage* can imply a stage or place where a youth is isolated to have his image objectified in photographs. The background around Sponagle’s body in the image has only white space around it, and this reinforces an idea of a controlled space, such as a studio, focusing attention only on the youth in a manner that appears to fetishise his presentation. The title *The Shooting Stage* also communicates information regarding the play’s violence. As the play progresses the level of threat increases until it arrives at a stage where guns are shot, a stage where shooting occurs. MacLennan’s title offers two differing meanings that add to, and contextualize, the various themes that the play’s poster presents.

The themes of the image are changed by their overt reference to the process of theatre. Examining the image, clues are offered that indicate that the subject is an adult actor and not an actual youth. Both of Sponagle’s arms are tattooed, and while some youth may get tattoos while underage, tattoos have associations of adulthood. In Canada, industry practices usually make them unavailable to those under eighteen without parental consent (“Body”). Sponagle’s hairy legs also offer the secondary sexual characteristics of a post-pubescent male. While Sponagle has a youthful face, his physique is clearly that of an adult. The contrast between his juvenile pose and his adult physiognomy allows a discerning eye to read the thematic elements that the image suggests while also being reminded of the notion that the figure is contextualised as an element of theatre, where an adult actor is
playing a youth. This image may raise an expectation that the play may not be presented in a wholly naturalistic manner, as the fiction of the representation is revealed. The voyeuristic suggestions that the camera’s lens provides also remind a viewer of the act of looking, which theatre invites. Additionally, the remainder of the poster’s text gives only information concerning details of how to access the theatrical production, the names of the artists involved and a few tiny logos of three levels of government granting agencies. The poster presents its suggestions of non-heteronormative and transgressive content only in the one large image that takes up the entire left-hand side of the poster, yet clearly frames those suggestions as a part of a play in a theatre through its numerous details listed on the right. No other images were used in the promotion of the play, other than production stills included in press kits for reviews. As the play became successful, the advertisements (using a smaller version of the poster) were modified with call outs from various reviews. However, these did not add any contextualising information or details about the play, but rather short phrases praising the play’s script and performances. In sum, the advertising for the play revealed the play’s themes of gun violence, youth, voyeurism and non-heteronormative sexuality to a potential audience. These themes were contextualised in such a way to suggest the play had non-naturalistic elements.

Programming

The Firehall presented nine productions in its fall-winter season of 2000-2001. Of these productions, it produced or co-produced six shows, and rented the space for the remainder. The theatre’s choice of productions reflects interests of multiculturalism, non-mainstream political values, and a wide range of performance styles. One of this season’s shows was mounted by WET theatre. This Yukon based theatre advertises itself as
“committed to creating multidisciplinary, collaborative theatre productions with a female aesthetic” (“Longest”). Another production was presented by Alvin Erasga Tolentino. This artist’s webpage describes his work as

. . . addressing themes that reflect . . . individuality, global awareness and ethnicity . . . [W]e expose and explore issues of cultural identity, gender, hybridity, and promote cross-cultural dialogue . . . Our mission is to recognize and celebrate Asian heritage and diversity within Canadian multiculturalism. (Co.ERASGA)

This show notably featured nude dancers. A third show was the only non-Canadian production, featuring the South African dance of Vincent Mantsoe. The remainder of the shows produced by the Firehall were dance.

The season’s dramatic (co)productions included *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*, by Marie Clements and *Corporate U*, a collective creation. Both productions challenged normative constructions of white privilege and capitalism. The first told the stories of Native Canadian women who had disappeared from Vancouver’s downtown east side (where the theatre is located), and its author is Métis. The second used narratives from the Seattle G8 riots as subject matter to “explore how corporations - richer and more powerful than most countries - influence our attitudes, relationships, economies and environment” (“Headlines”). The Firehall also presented *Filthy Rich*, a late-seventies, noirish spoof by George F. Walker. Their rentals included *Chekhov’s Shorts*, by Theatre Smith-Gilmour (a Le Coq-based, physical theatre troupe) and *The Truth About Daughters*, a one man show from the Maritimes.
Through the theatre’s programming, a viewer could easily identify interests in multiculturalism, a broad variety of theatrical styles, and themes which challenge and question conservative values. While the Firehall’s programming is almost entirely Canadian, it also reflects regional representation and work oriented towards subcultural Canadian themes and identities. The theatre’s offering of a wide representation of performative arts, (not only including dance but also collective creation and physical theatre) indicates an appreciation of non-mainstream theatrical forms. The programming’s thematic focus on both marginalised Native women and corporate abuses of power signal the theatre has a willingness to veer from presentations which reaffirm a status quo. These programming interests likely appeal to a potential viewer who not only is interested in wide selection of theatrical expression but also in the various ways performance may both challenge and reflect contemporary cultural anxieties. Through this programming the theatre creates a broad horizon of expectations that would work to both construct and reflect particular audiences’ interests.

Geographical and Material Aspects of the Theatre

The Firehall Theatre is on the corner of Cordova and Gore avenues in Vancouver’s downtown east side (DTES). It is diagonally across the block from the neighbourhood’s defining intersection of Main and East Hastings. The neighbourhood is likely the most notorious in Canada, renowned for extreme poverty, high rates of HIV infection, prostitution, and heroin addiction. Due to its demographics many consider it to be the “largest Native reserve in Canada” (Brethour 1). The area is framed as a site of despair in much public and media discourse, so much so that any visitor to the theatre would likely be aware of its reputation as a skid row (Thompson; Duffy). Problems concerning the theatre’s
location are acknowledged by the artistic director, Donna Spencer, in her Canada Council grant application. She states that the company is aware of criticism over the theatre’s neighbourhood, and acknowledges receiving "far too many calls from patrons expressing fear about the location despite their interest in the programming." She also expresses hope (in 2001) that the area is changing and that theatre may appeal to "new, higher income residents" (Canada Council, *Grant* 9, 60). Spencer also writes that the theatre enjoys an “enriching relationship . . . with the DTES community . . .” by establishing "lasting trust and creative partnerships with eastside residents and social services" (60). The theatre’s outreach policies are emblematic of strong community activism in the area. In 2000, three levels of government came together in order to address the area’s endemic problems with The Vancouver Agreement (“Vancouver”). The announcement of this project in March that year characterized the neighbourhood as beginning to transition and renew. To a potential viewer, this characterisation may have affected his or her choice to visit or support the theatre.

The DTES is immediately east of the city’s new downtown, which has for the past twenty five years experienced a large construction boom. Gentrification has since encroached upon the west side of the DTES. To the south of the neighbourhood lies Chinatown and the BC rail-lands, also transitioning through gentrification. East of the area are the Strathcona and Commercial Drive neighbourhoods, both eclectic residential and commercial neighbourhoods, renowned for multiculturalism (Kalman 35). To the north and south early and mid-twentieth century architecture and industrial infrastructure (much in disrepair) remind a visitor that the area was the city’s original downtown core. The overt, urban decay in combination with encroaching gentrification suggests two opposing forces
of both renewal and stagnation in operation. As the city has gentrified, prostitution and other social problems have been shifted to and concentrated in the DTES. Along with these problems, and the area’s notable demographic and cultural shifts have also come considerable public discourse, pitting values concerning social welfare against the pressures of capitalism and the open market in housing.

Susan Bennett discusses the importance of location to an audience’s expectations. She writes “the milieu which surrounds a theatre is always ideologically encoded and the presence of a theatre can be measured as typical or incongruous within it” (Bennett, *Theatre* 126). While theatre has typical associations with high culture and specific class hierarchies, the Firehall’s surroundings present a mix of differing ideologies of which some may appear to be incongruous to traditional expectations of theatre-going (127). The contrast between dereliction (and associated social issues) in the DTES and the appearance of highly-financed urban renewal on its periphery offers a viewer a variety of perspectives through which to contextualise their theatrical experience at the Firehall. The contrast also creates an interesting resonance with the themes of MacLennan’s play, where ideologies from past eras may no longer appear as satisfactory understandings today. As MacLennan’s play references some ideologically oriented constructions of homosexuality from an older era, at times questioning their validity, the neighbourhood of the theatre also presents varying historical and ideological values at work, often in direct opposition with each other.

Circulating news articles concerning sex and violence in the local area also create background to the play-going experience. Most notably, at the time of the play the DTES had experienced the disappearance of more than thirty, mostly Aboriginal women, many of whom were sex workers. A widely held assertion that a serial killer was operating in the
area was borne out when Robert Picton was arrested and charged ten months after the show. At the time of the play’s performances, the issue had gained high public visibility. Marie Clements’s play earlier that season, *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*, explored the theme of disappeared Native Canadian women. The presentation of her play (and her profile as playwright-in-residence at the theatre in 2001-2) would have increased viewer awareness of the circulating fears and concerns of sex-related crime.

The Reena Virk murder in late 1997 would also create contexts for viewing *The Shooting Stage*. Virk was a fourteen-year-old girl murdered in a bullying attack by fellow students in Victoria. Victoria is only a few hours away, by ferry, from the theatre. The Virk case made headlines for several years because of the cruelty of the torment that led to Virk’s death and was further sustained because one of the main accused had three separate trials. The case was reported frequently across Canada and in great detail, so much so that the *Globe and Mail* commented that the crime had been "elevated into a national tragedy" (Cernetig et al.). The Virk murder brought a great deal of media attention to levels of violence amongst youth and bullying in schools.

Both the Virk case and the DTES missing women would have created contexts for viewing MacLennan’s play. Given knowledge of the Virk murder, its proximity to the area, and the protracted attention of the crime in the media, the play’s depiction of violence by youth would likely be received in relation to Virk’s situation. While none of the DTES missing women’s bodies had yet been located by the time of the play’s performance, the broad media conjecture connecting the missing women to prostitution and the presumed violence in their disappearance would have created connections between marginalised sexual behaviours and violence. The discourses surrounding the missing women as mostly
being sex workers may have affected the reception of the play’s exploration of violence against homosexuals who, like sex workers, serve as the sexual Other. Furthermore the relationship between Malcolm and Derrick operates as a kind of sex work where Malcolm pays Derrick for the erotic sensations of abusing him.

The marginalisation of those forced into the sex trade differs in many ways from the marginalisation of gay youth. Yet their mutual exclusion from normative constructions of sexuality could underscore and perhaps naturalise associations of violence with homosexuality. Such associations may distance a viewer’s sense of normalcy and inclusion in regards to homosexuality. Alternately these associations may create slippage between the social problem of prostitution and the social understandings of homosexuality; that is, these associations may invite a perception of prostitution as a social ill which overlaps with and informs their understandings of homosexuality.

The production’s geographic and temporal location brings with it contexts which may affect the reception of the play’s gay themes. The marginalisation of non-normative sexuality, and circulating narratives of violence and bullying I believe would all serve to underscore various themes in *The Shooting Stage*.

**Firehall Theatre**

The Firehall Arts Centre Building was designed by architect William Tuff Whiteway and completed as Firehall No. 1 in 1907 (Kalman 50). Designated as a heritage building, its adaptive re-use still maintains much of the original exterior architectural features. The theatre has a large red sign which indicates its function as a performance space, but its architecture also codes it former use with its large arch-bays through which fire engines formerly drove. The building is surrounded by a mixture of old and newer
architecture including: a former Orange hall – now filled with Asian shops and grocery stores – an Anglican church, senior’s home, second hand stores and the Vancouver Police Museum, which lies immediately to the west of the theatre. The theatre's surroundings create an eclectic atmosphere which codes the area’s history, the theatre’s proximity to Chinatown and the area’s demographics.

The theatre’s streetfront displays posters and advertisements. A wheelchair ramp provides access to the entrance, a few feet above street level. Inside, an inner, open courtyard and bar presents an area for preshow socialising. The lobby reflects the structure’s initial function by featuring exposed brick, wood wainscoting and other construction elements of the building’s original architecture. While the theatre is marked as a performance space by its internal infrastructure and its large, exterior sign, its roots as a fire hall are still obvious. Ric Knowles writes about how non-traditional theatre buildings in non-traditional locales, such as the Firehall, are as ideologically coded as designed-as-theatre structures (Knowles Reading 65-70). He notes however, that “such coding is more likely to be community oriented, populist, or even overtly resistant to dominant ideologies (71). The Firehall structure appears to reflect ideas of civic and municipal heritage in its original architecture, while its adaptive reclamation appears to invite and embrace its contemporary local community, and suggests involvement in the neighbourhood.

**Performance Space**

The main performance space at the Firehall is described as “an intimate black box studio with the stage at floor level and a single raked bank of seating for 136 (in standard configuration) situated in a converted heritage building” (“Technical”). The seats are softly upholstered, but held on aluminum planks as part of a flexible system that allows for
differing seating configurations about the space. The theatre is fully equipped with modern light and sound equipment (“Technical”). The theatre’s walls are typically unadorned except for theatrical equipment and are painted a neutral, flat black.

The black box theatre is a specific style of performance space that was brought to public attention in the first decades of the twentieth century (Hannah 24). As a space with much greater flexibility than the nineteenth-century norm of a fixed-feature proscenium arch design, it is supposedly devoid of the meanings inherently found in that formalised design (Hannah 25, 28). Its flexibility draws from a lack of fixity in seating and proscribed stage area, and a void of colour or embellishing architectural features. This is meant to allow an “opening up or loosening of proxemic relations in performance in order to escape the tyranny of architectonic grandeur and its aesthetic and ideological implications” (Elam 63). Dorita Hannah states that such spaces' "perceived emptiness is reflected in a paucity of architectural and theatrical discourse surrounding the model" (1). Yet Knowles writes such theatres still fill their supposed ideological void with meanings as “all [theatre] spaces are equally (if differently) charged” (Knowles, Reading 65). Borrett suggests one way the black box is ideologically meaningful is that “there is no longer any frame separating the actor from the audience; the ideology of the avant-garde sought to break down the barrier between art and life. The real consequence of this, however . . . was that the audience was ‘brazenly sucked into the frame’ ” (Borret and T’Jonck 55). This tendency may be sensed by some audiences in some black box theatres. However, this may not occur at the Firehall. With its banked rows of seats and stage directly in front of the audience, the theatre in some ways resembles a proscenium arch configuration in its separation of audience and stage (although this is less demarcated by its floor-level playing area), and in its unidirectional
viewing angle. The rake of the seat’s tiers also allows for some (vertical) spatial separation from the stage. Conversely, its lack of adornment, utilitarian design, equally priced, first-come-first-serve seats (at 30-50 percent lower prices than the Arts Club) and lack of a raised stage create an expectation of theatre that is less about an “occasion” and associated mainstream rituals of theatre attendance than the expectation the Arts Club creates.

Traditional theatre architecture is an extension of high culture which, by implication, reinforces the mainstream and politically dominant values (Bennett, *Theatre* 129). Buildings that disrupt high cultural expectations in their audience’s experience through their architecture and design do "not, then, overcode the performance in this way" (129). The Firehall has some elements in its design that de-emphasise an expectation of receiving a product of high culture, and replace it instead with sense of community experience. The lack of emphasis on receiving a product of high culture accordingly minimises the space’s potential as a site for the replaying and representation of mainstream values, or at the very least, allows an expectation for some challenges of those values to be staged.

The text of the play adheres to some of the conventions of both realism and naturalism. It places ordinary, believable characters into (mostly) plausible situations to create drama. In other words, it appears to create the mostly “mimetic, objective representation of outer reality” found in realism (Furst 8). However, the text and production use some strategies to distance the work from conventional realist performances. The text does not follow some normative conventions of breaking the action up into contained scenes. Numerous scenes run into each other and overlap. The changes in place and time are not overtly signalled in dialogue and are left to the director to create through scenic
effects, including lighting. An audience’s sense of time and place is likely briefly disturbed as new scenes unfold. The play’s temporality mostly moves forward in real time, but near the end of the play an intertextual moment suggests either a flashback or an imagined scene. At this point Len and Malcolm, in their adult costumes, recall their youth as they recite lines from their childhood characters on television. Intertextuality (in this case recalling a television script to comment on their present situation) is a commonly used dramaturgical tactic, and often breaks the conceit that the audience is viewing a realistic playing of characters’ lives. A more overt break occurs when Elliot flies away after being shot. Described as a miracle, the moment evokes spiritual or supra-physical forces at play, forces that are found in neither realistic nor naturalistic theatre.

The play’s expressionistic and highly stylised set worked in harmony with these ideas. Designed by Yvan Morissette, it was composed of abstract transformable boxes on different levels, which became imitations of various objects as they were used by the actors. The backdrop contained large faces of what could be glamorous women, or men, in drag. The design’s simplicity allowed for instant changes in setting while only using a minimum requirement of visual information to inform the audience of place and time. These strategies allow for naturalistic acting and dialogue to play within a space where the audience is asked to fill in details and work to construct a full world of the play through their imagination. Ric Knowles and others have commented on the primacy of naturalistic modes of production in contemporary theatre, and how naturalism is the predominant style in much mainstream production (Knowles, Reading 141; Milner 229). Its prevalence is such that, “naturalism creates a secure sense of order by delivering its ideology as normative” (Knowles, Reading 141). The play’s use of naturalistic dialogue and performance within a non-naturalistic
staging veers from such a sense and expectation, but only to a degree, as the actors’ performances, arguably the central focus of script-based, non-musical theatre, still retain that sense of order.

**Program**

*The Shooting Stage*’s program repeats the design of the poster on its cover, promoting the expectations that the play not be conventionally realist. On the first inside page is featured “Playwright’s Notes.” Here MacLennan comments on what it means to grow up. He writes he is “aware of the degree to which bullying, bashing and bloodshed pervade adolescence today” and “that the solutions we muster don’t seem to address the root causes, or offer youth what they really need” (*Program Shooting 2*). He refers to the need of “someone waiting on the other side [of an initiation] to challenge and reassure us.” This comment refers to Elliot’s journey without the benefit of a responsive parent. The notes also refer to the play’s “transformative experience of intimacy;” however no information is offered referring to the sexual issues and identities that the play explores.

The program sets a generalised expectation of contemporary and local social issues concerning youth and violence, but only vaguely references any sexual or homosexual content.

The program’s list of personnel involved in the show sets a different tone from *His Greatness*. All *The Shooting Stage*’s actors list extensive experience, with the younger actors listing work at Studio 58. The Firehall is not listed in any of the actors’ bios. Additionally, many of them also mention their feelings and offer thanks for the opportunity to work on an “interesting” and “wonderful” show (*Program Shooting 2-3*). While their comments about working on the show are politically neutral, their tone is much more
personal than those offered in *His Greatness*’s program. Some of them also include personal details about family life, and make jokes about themselves. By personalising the artists in this manner, and inviting the audience member to consider their lives outside of the performance, these additional details seem to decrease the theatrical distance between the performer and the audience. This decreased distance may cause the homosexualities represented by the former to be manifest more conspicuously to the audience.

**Critical Reception**

*The Shooting Stage*’s critical reception provides a wide variety of interpretations about the performance; some of these reassert historical constructions of homosexuality, and some mention gay themes only in these terms, while others affirm MacLennan’s work as consciousness-raising on a variety of issues. Sex with minors is rarely addressed by reviews but many discuss Len’s photography in ways that range from replaying the nuances of an art-versus-pornography debate to framing Len as a paedophile himself. All reviewers praise the performances of the actors, identifying their authenticity and realism.

Tracey Page’s (*Xtra!West*) review, entitled “Whose interpretation?” discusses how an audience’s preconceived notions inform the issues in the play. She locates peer pressure, bulling and gay-bashing as predominant themes. She mentions the Taber High School shooting and the Reena Virk murder as salient connections to the work, as they all concern teenagers “perceived as different” (Page). While she identifies Elliot as effeminate, a drag performer and “in love with his best friend,” she doesn’t identify the sex of the best friend nor specifically label Elliot as gay (Page). Kevin Kerr (from the *Georgia Straight*) identifies Elliot as gay, and the pressures of “sexual conformity” as lying at the root of the play’s “sexual violence and abuse of power” (Kerr). He remarks on Elliot’s drag fantasy as an
escape tactic, removing the possibility that his drag is a part of his sexuality or sexual identity. Both these reviews identify social constructions in the public consciousness at the roots of the play’s violence.

Anne Fleming’s piece (in the Georgia Straight) comments on the play's relevance to levels of violence in youth culture, touching on school shootings and the Virk case. When she refers to Elliot's bullying, she contextualises him as a "swan-loving sissy boy," using a pejorative that conflates homosexuality with effeminacy and thus evokes the Wildean model. However she never mentions homosexuality per se in the review. She does, however, discuss Len's trial as an artist who uses naked children in his work, without referring to it as pornography. In this manner she engages in one of the debates the play probes. Leanne Campbell (from The Globe and Mail) articulates these ideas as well, suggesting the same didactic approach towards the subject apparent in the play. However, neither of these reviewers mentions the child pornography that Derrick and Malcolm create. Campbell also refers to Elliot as a “drag princess,” accentuating his effeminacy and youth. She does not reference homosexuality in her review, other than to mention that the play will resonate with persons of “any orientation.” If her reference to drag is intended to code the presence of homosexual themes in the play, the reference then conflates effeminacy with homosexuality.

Jo Ledingham (from the Vancouver Courier) identifies the social issues of “bullying and gay bashing” together in the play, but does not explore their politics beyond teens’ struggles with their own sexuality. She addresses Len’s photography as “not pornographic” but artistic. However she seems to read Len as having a paraphilia, in that his work “captures what he cannot have: young boys” (Ledingham, “Gays”). Her reading appears to
conflate his artistic sensibility with being gay, which is then further conflated with paraphilic desires. In a sense her description calls on and melds two historical constructions of homosexual men, the Wildean model and the “dangerous” paradigm of the four Ds.

Peter Birnie (of *The Vancouver Sun*) describes the play as profoundly homocentric and proposes that the characters’ lack of women in their lives lies at root of their problems. He refers to characters who suffer “almost to a man” from “absence of wife or mother or the girlfriend they never had” (Birnie, *Shooting*). While he identifies Elliot’s “linking his recently dead mother to a trumpeter swan,” his expansion on this theme propagates an understanding that heteronormative pairings would solve these characters’ (and perhaps by extension, all gay men’s) problems. Yet there is no evidence that any character other than Elliot is without a mother. And nothing appears to be preventing any of the characters from gaining a girlfriend or wife, other than their sexual orientation. His proposal appears thus a veiled plea for all men to embrace heteronormative relationships regardless of their orientation. He does not explain how the presence of “wife or mother or the girlfriend” could possibly benefit each character or make them suffer less. Birnie also claims the playwright to have “been all over the gay scene” because of the wide range of character types seen in the play’s dramatis personae. His comments imply a connection between the subject of the play and the playwright’s personal life, and sexual history. “All over the gay scene” may be intended to merely indicate experience in a general gay social group, but has resonances that imply promiscuity. The comment suggests a correlation between creating a range of gay characters (and perhaps non-stereotypical ones) and direct experience, as if imagination is not a factor in MacLennan’s creative process. This reasoning not only limits
the artistic abilities that may be expected from gay playwrights, but also frames such artistic abilities as associated with promiscuity, reasserting the dangerous aspect of the four Ds.

**Audience**

The conditions of production and reception can inform how the performance constituted its audiences. One can look at the conditions as a set of inducements and hindrances that may construct an audience that is amenable to the play’s themes from the larger available pool of Vancouver theatre-goers. As the conditions may draw or repel various interests, they can provide an estimation of what audiences are likely to attend. The play’s ticket price makes attendance available to a range of audience, likely from lower middle class and upwards (however these prices still likely preclude many of the neighbourhood’s residents). The play’s advertising suggests the play will approach non-heteronormative portrayals of men and boys: portrayals that likely feature under-age sexuality, effeminacy and violence. This advertising would invite an audience that would not be deterred by a discomfort towards these subjects. The theatre’s programming suggests an audience which enjoys theatrical performance that is multicultural and wide-ranging in performance style, even while the play itself presents only white males. The theatre’s location may deter some attendance, but will certainly create contexts addressing class, race, privilege and history for those who attend. Circulating media considering social problems and crime are likely to add additional contexts to the sex and crime themes addressed in the play. The theatre space partially allows some distancing from the performance, but also may blur audience separation from the drama. The play’s utilisation of some realist elements in the dialogue and performance, countered with some non-realist expressions in design and script, allows audience members to find both comfort (in
receiving a performance product in traditional and familiar manner) and adventure or challenge (as the play simultaneously breaks away from some familiar conventions). As such the play’s mix of styles may appeal to a broad potential audience. The critical reception of the play varies widely in terms of what expectations are raised. Some audience may welcome the social critique that some reviewers discussed, while other may find intrigue in the play’s lauded performances. Some may choose to attend or not attend in reaction to the presence of gay themes, but others may not become aware of these themes through the particular media they read. The development process appears to project some audience members’ squeamishness with gay themes and accordingly de-emphasised some of the play’s gay presences. The theatre’s history and operations indicate a well-funded theatre that has long produced and maintained product of professional quality, and this creates expectations that audiences favouring traditional theatre will welcome.

Summary and Conclusion

*The Shooting Stage* features characters who present a broad range of constructions of homosexuality. These characters present male-male sexuality more overtly than do the characters in *His Greatness*. The play’s scenes where homoerotic attractions are developed and a scene with a performance of fellatio accentuate the sexual aspects of the play’s gay characters and present embodied homosexualities to the audience. The play’s presentation of gay sexuality, at times, references historical codings which in past have been used to marginalise gays. Yet the drama also critiques these codings and their depiction of gay men as effeminate, violent, or diseased. The portrayal of gay men also illustrates how a heteronormative schema may contribute to violence and bullying. The production’s position at some distance from the mainstream brings with it material conditions which add
dimensions to the text’s meanings. These conditions diverge from some of those expected in the mainstream to some degree, and in other measures are the same. Overall these conditions appear to create less distance between the play’s themes and its audience than do the conditions found at the Arts Club. While some conditions underscore the text’s historical codings, other conditions appear to promote social awareness and encourage cultural critique. Ultimately representations of homosexual identities and of homosexual sex in the production of *The Shooting Stage* are more visible to the audience than they are in *His Greatness*. Furthermore the production conditions appear to add visibility to issues about homosexuality that the play addresses, such bullying and homophobic violence.
Chapter Four: Gays, Class, and Camp

Conrad Alexandrowicz’s play *Beggars Would Ride* opened for a five day run at the Waterfront Theatre on Granville Island in Vancouver B.C. on January 24th, 2007, as a satellite event of the PuSh Festival. The play is a “musical satire in the tradition of Brecht/Weill about power, class, greed and lust…” that features two characters that express homosexual desires through sexual activity (Alexandrowicz, *Writer’s* 1). The play creates and contextualizes gay presences in a variety of ways. Gay desire is explicitly discussed yet ultimately gay sex, coming out of that desire, is not staged. The characters expressing gay desire appear partially drawn from contemporary gay culture yet also utilize motifs of the four Ds and the Wildean model. The play’s gay characterisations illustrate how institutionalized power systems frame gayness as being devoid of agency and power. The performance also creates gay presences through the use of a camp aesthetic, references to Weimar-era theatre, and pop cultural associations of musical theatre. These gay presences form a wide range of potential meanings. In the context of the production’s Brechtian style, the play’s gay presences are socially interventionist, illustrating issues of homosexuality alongside those of class and equality. However, the style of the play may also curtail the interventionist potential of the performance, depending on the audience’s reception of the play’s mix of genres and styles.

Text

The text of *Beggars Would Ride* features Frank and Morley, whose identities as gay, sexually active men are complicated by their positions in a fictional, exaggerated class structure. This structure appears as part of “some fantastic Otherworld where people speak in a strange, re-invented version of English” and “society is divided into two classes; those
who consume and those who work and serve” (*sic*) (Alexandrowicz, *Production Script* 1). These classes consist of the “Nobelesse obelige” and their slaves, or “servanets” (*sic*). The former are “decadent aristocrats who own the estate [,] carouse [,]” “and drink and fark [fuck] because [they] were born for and not to deny” (1; 35). The servanets are a wholly-owned class of slaves “whom [the Nobelesse] abuse and exploit in various ways” (*sic*) (1). The disparity between the classes forms the basis of the play’s narrative.

The plot involves two Nobelesse masters, Ravinia and Morley, who own three servanets: Zinna and Rufus (who are siblings), and new arrival, Frank. The masters’ sexual abuse of the three servanets incites the servanets to overthrow the social order. To do so, Rufus uses the sexually attractive Frank to seduce and then divide both masters. After the coup, Morley kills Ravinia. Zinna then reveals she is pregnant by Morley, and the two of them strike a deal in which Morley returns to control of the estate, in exchange for Zinna ascending to a new status as a Nobelesse master. Rufus and Frank return to suffering as servanets and appear to acknowledge their lot is unlikely to change.

**Characters**

Frank is first described in the text’s opening notes as “young, very good-looking, of uncertain sexuality and not terribly bright, but doing his best” (Alexandrowicz, *Production Script* 1). Frank’s description, his “uncertain sexuality,” being “very good-looking” and “not terribly bright,” make him useful as sexual bait in Rufus’s plans for social revolution. These details of Frank’s character suggest the contemporary, gay-subcultural designation of a “twink.” Some texts claim the origin of this term draws from the twinkie, a confection known as “a tasty, cream-filled snack with no nutritional value. The phallic shape of the ‘TWINKIE’ snack cake should not escape the reader’s attention” (Twink Urban). Various
texts offer characterisations of a twink which include: being effeminate, attractiveness, hairlessness, being tanned, youth (late teens to early twenties), boyishness, slenderness or a lack of musculature, a seemingly submissive sexuality (often feminised by being a bottom) and lack of intellect (“Twink” *Oxford*; “Twink” *Urban*; “Twink” *Wikipedia*; Reuter 215; Tortorici 205; Hoffman 68). The prevalence of these definitions indicates that “twink” is a recognised category in gay subculture. In this subculture, the combination of sexual attractiveness and lack of intelligence allows the twink to be regarded as an object of desire often sought by older, well-heeled, gay men. A twink’s boyish slenderness indicates a physical lack of strength, which combined with a low intellect, makes him child-like, socially unsophisticated and inexperienced. His boyishness further presents him as an incomplete man as his physicality lacks some of secondary sexual characteristics (body hair and musculature) traditionally associated with masculinity. The twink’s agency in a gay sexual economy derives from his desirability as a site for penetration (Tortorici 206). In regards to the gender and power relations of these qualities, twinks can be considered to be “symbolically constructed as men embodying femininity” (Schippers 97).

These perceptions of gender and power map the roles in the play to a degree. David Halperin writes that there is “an age-old practice of classifying sexual relations in terms of penetration versus being penetrated, superordinate versus subordinate status, masculinity versus femininity, activity versus passivity – in terms of *hierarchy and gender*” (Halperin, “How To” 96). The play’s narrative refers to Frank’s sexuality as both a “bottom” and a “top,” and so assuming both dominant and submissive positions. Frank’s only currency in the estate’s sexual economy derives from his allure as a twink, as this is used as the weapon to initiate the servanets’ coup. While Frank appears as both a bottom and a top, his position
as a servanet, the abuse he endures, and his boyish physicality all indicate an obvious lack of power. He is also, as a newcomer to the estate, at the bottom rung amongst his own class. Furthermore, he is seen as inept at his work, and this places him in jeopardy amongst his fellow workers. His ineptness, and being considered “not terribly bright,” also replays the demented aspect of the four Ds, in that Frank is described as having a diminished, or limited, mental capacity.

In gay culture the twink designation can be considered among other constructions that operate to demarcate gay men into classes based on physical appearance, age, and status. These parameters intersect with notions of capitalism and hegemony, in terms of the power exchange presumed between those who desire twinks and the twinks who trade on this desire to their benefit. In many ways the twink’s attractiveness parallels that of the “trophy wife.” Both reflect capitalism through the exchange of flesh for gains in comfort and lifestyle. If this kind of exchange were strictly commercial, the notion of “trade,” or homosexual prostitution, also comes into play (Chauncey 70). Frank’s gay representation also has some similarities with circulating notions of concerning “trade.” His slave-master relationship with Morley appears to reflect narratives of trade where working class men have availed themselves to wealthier males as a means of survival.

Frank’s story however, differs from both these narratives in several ways. He has no agency or choice in the coercive sex he experiences with Morley. Furthermore “trade” traditionally are identified as straight, as their traditionally penetrative role didn’t necessarily carry with it associations of effeminacy and loss of power (Kaye 11-16; Chauncey 70). Frank’s identifying at times as being a “bottom” is thus ill-suited to the most circulating understandings of trade. Frank also deviates from the some descriptions of the
twink model in terms of his motivations. Rather than material gain, Frank’s use of his desirability is to undermine the cohesion of the Nobelesse class. Yet through this subversion of structures of power he does gain agency and, temporarily, freedom. Nevertheless, his characterisation appears to reference narratives of twinks, trophy wives, and trade.

The evocation of a twink is of further note in that it uses a construction that derives from contemporary, gay subculture. While its use may have negative connotations (for example, promiscuity, a valuing of physicality over character), Alexandrowicz’s use of a gay subcultural construction invites the reader to read the script from a gay point of view.

The script offers more details about Frank's sexuality in songs and monologues. These sections inform a reader about the operation of homosexual relations within the play’s class milieu. In scene five Frank describes his lot as a servanet. He sings “The Rich Go Fish” which tells the story of his leaving home at a young age with a male lover:

A man, um…friend…I had…
Ran off with him, long many a-go,
Parents too poor to say yes or no.
And He of the high Nobelesse obelige,
Took me on a trip, wide world to see!
Down the rocky coast in a big slow boat
Dressed me to the part. the long leather coat,
The pigskin case, the hat and suit,
Drinkin’ cherry brandy with a fine cheroot.
… Port after port, I saw it all. (Alexandrowicz, Production Script 17)
The song tells about Frank’s travelling partner, a member of the Nobelesse obelige. Franks describes him as a “man” but then hesitates, corrects himself, and reframes him as a “friend” (17). As such it appears that Frank wishes to emphasise the relationship between them and wants him to be known more as a “friend.” His description of his travelling companion suggests that their relationship was sexual, as “friend” suggests a more intimate relationship than “man.” However the nature of the relationship is not made explicit, and may be understood by a reader as an indication of Frank’s own issues, such as shame or denial of his liaison with the man, or some social proscription against such a relationship. Frank’s describing their departure as having “ran off with him” suggests both that his leaving was clandestine and that their cross-class sexual pairing may have been transgressive (17). His parents being “too poor to say yes or no”, speaks to their inability to stop the venture, suggesting that when the Nobelesse man desired Frank’s presence, his parents had no say in the matter. Their inability is connected to their poverty, implying they either could not afford legal redress to prevent their child being taken, or that they needed to sell Frank in order to survive. The passage also leads an audience to speculate that Frank wasn’t of age and so had been under the care of his parents. These suggestions all relate to the large discrepancy between the two men’s agency, as determined by their class.

Jeffrey Weeks writes about a pattern in western culture where “middle-class, self defined homosexuals” take up with younger working-class men who appear to be “relatively indifferent to homosexual behaviour” (Weeks, “Discourse” 143). Alan Sinfield finds ample representations of this pattern in the drama of the mid-twentieth century, stating that in the late 1950s “the model of queer relations which dominated public perception [was] the discreet cross-class liason” (Sinfield, “Is” 87). However Sinfield in *Out On Stage*
hypothesises that this scenario may be a “subcultural myth” which portrayed many of the anxieties circulating around homosexuality of the time (154). He notes that the cross-class relationship allowed the higher class man to find men that would not classify themselves as “queer”, and whose interests in such a liaison “might be . . . motivated largely by social deference and financial advantage: probably they were married” (this kind of pairing also has obvious resonances to “trade,” as discussed earlier this chapter) (154). Such arrangements could disguise the relationship, and avoid the social stigma of being identified as gay. Frank’s departure with the man appears to be marginally compensated by the clothing he is offered. However in the brutal class system of the play social deference to the Nobelesse class appears obligatory. Frank’s telling of how the “man” “[d]ressed me to the part. The long leather coat, /The pigsin case, the hat and suit, /Drinkin’ cherry brandy with a fine cheroot” suggests that Frank was disguised as a Nobelesse on their journey. If this disguise were used to thwart suspicions of Frank’s class, then there is an implication that the nature of their pairing needed to be kept unseen. These suggestions of both a cross-class pairing and a gay relationship are intertwined, as is the evidence of proscription against them. From this song the reader can infer the play’s social constructs, in that two men of different classes aren’t meant to be seen travelling together, let alone in a sexual relationship with each other.

Frank’s journey illustrates several anxieties about homosexuality. His departure replays the dangerous mode of the four Ds, in that it suggests Frank has been unwillingly taken away from his family (and suggests a forcible recruitment into a homosexual milieu), and that homosexuals may be threatening (or dangerous) to young people in that regard. It
also plays on class issues, where class disparity allows for the sexual exploitation of the vulnerable, even in a scenario where that sexuality itself is considered taboo.

Same-sex relations are also apparently disdained among the servanet class. In scene six, Frank’s sexuality is suspected and then disparaged, while he is manipulated by the other servanets. Rufus asserts that Frank has gay desires. “You like the sowsage [sausage], don’t you, Franky-ma-boy? Had you figured since you got here” (Alexandrowicz, Production script 19). Zinna concurs with Rufus; “He does, he loves it, is what. I can tell; I got a nose, scent-wise, for a man who wavers off the straight and narrow. Likes to get under the prong. Can’t get enough of the sowsage and the pinky-pink butt-hole!” (19). Their tone and derogatory framings of Frank’s sexuality indicate an antipathy for homosexuality amongst the servanet class. This perception of homosexuality is of note. While they are a part of the bottom class of society, the servanets still marginalise other members of their class to an even lower level. Through the text, a reader finds the play’s intricacies of class conflict also operate to diversify the society’s antipathy of gay expression. The text reveals more details of how class and sexual orientation are intertwined in the portrayal of Morley.

In scene six Morley reveals details of his homosexuality through his soliloquy;

The first time... A he, like me, of the Nobelesse Obeleege [sic]. He having asked direction while I out shooting. The dark wood in the hush of dusk, deep green of summer. He covers me his big cape, wide and black and thick and smelling of a man. And then much, O so much of the smelly and furry enjoyment. And I, just eighteen, finally stand up feeling O so quite turned inaside out, and I say. What the name? Mine MORLEY-Hugh, and shake his hand, he having shaken ever-a-thing in me. Baron Everhard, he say! No, not
really, say I? Yes, really, say he. And family Everhard from the county next
door, lined with cash and linked cousin-wise to our own. I never told no-one,
and most certain not the dad, cause the Everhards friends of the dad,
y’know…
And then frontwards come along, the mouth without teeth. The dad gives me
a maid for the twentieth, my own to play with, will-as-I-wish. “About time
you get the ding-dong wet into the mouth-without-teeth,” he say. The dad!
Okay, did ever YOUR dad give you a maid present for the bornday? No
knickers on under that black and white get-up? No, mebbe not. And she
perfectly willing and able, wet-wise and smokey. She had this red mark on
her, like she’d spilled her wine, but I not looking at her face. And I, afeared
to fail and be spanked with the shame of the little wee limpdick, found,
surprise be and praise to Gode, just as happy to make the fleshy plunge as to
plungèd be. What do you think about that? It gooier and longer, but just as
furry, smelly, naughty. Well, not so naughty, ‘cause the dad give her t’me,
not breaking the Rule of Dad like with manmeat. And I think, to get a baby
in! ME!
Cause frontwards is as to go on and on. hundreds and thousands of me
coming out of me. But not as much pure O-Ah-O fun as backwards-in.
electrified thunder carried mouthward into yelling at the moon, as though to
end right now, and no more thoughts, ever. Do you see?
And so, I purport and propose, the thing be would to do frontwards and backwards-in at the same time! The stable-boy and the maid! And then my brain finally not so itchy, say I.

Well, that took but a good long time. I may be rich-as-Creasy, but not the swiftest horsey at the gate. O, well… But, you get me, right?

(Alexandrowicz, Production Script 40-41)

Morley likes being penetrated by a powerful male friend of his family, Baron Everhard. That Morley “never told no-one, and most certain not the dad” suggests his sexual engagement with the Baron is taboo. This idea is reinforced by his mention of the “breaking the Rule of Dad like with manmeat”; the rule appears to indicate that male flesh (at least from his own class) is considered sexually off-limits.

When, at age twenty, Morley is given a servanet woman “to play with”, he is surprised to enjoy penetrating her as well as being penetrated. His claim of “just as happy” with a woman suggests he is bisexual. However, he then qualifies that having sex with a man is naughtier than with a woman, because it is prohibited. A level of heterosexual performance also appears to be expected of him, that if not achieved may leave him “spanked with the shame of the little wee limpdick.” Impotence is shameful in Morley’s culture. He also revels at the idea of his ejaculate and his ability to procreate: “hundreds and thousands of me coming out of me” (41). The script accentuates his reference to himself in this passage with italics, which suggests that when having sex “frontwards” or heterosexually penetrating, there is an additional bonus of the possibility of reproducing; “cause frontwards is as to go on and on” (41). Although in other passages the social
construct of the play appears to forbid cross-class reproduction, Morley seems to find the potential to reproduce an exciting aspect of heterosexuality.

Despite this enthusiasm, Morley claims that heterosexual penetration is “not as much pure O-Ah-O fun as backwards-in” (being penetrated himself). He describes the sensations of being penetrated in ecstatic terms: “electrified thunder carried mouthward into yelling at the moon, as though to end right now, and no more thoughts, ever” indicating a level of pleasure that results in oblivion. Even with the “rule of dad” prohibiting homosexual behaviour, he appears to erotically prefer this form of sexuality.

Morley’s bisexual performance is practical. His position and power are defined by class, to which membership appears to be strictly controlled through inheritance (this becomes clear when the pregnant Zinna must be disguised as a member of the Nobelesse in order for Morley to claim paternity of the child). Heterosexual behaviours allow him to reproduce, ensure his legacy and the continuation of the play’s class system and privilege. He appears to acknowledge a certain attraction to heterosexual behaviours, but these are qualified in their reassuring of his ability to reproduce. Simultaneously he speaks of homosexual encounters with emotional language that appears to indicate his responses are based in desire. While these behaviours appear to be prohibited both inside and outside his own class, he has homosexual liaisons with the servanet class to satisfy his desire, and yet still may have heterosexual encounters which appear to prove his abilities and place in his class.

Penetration

After Morley’s speech, Frank enters and begins to seduce Morley. Morley is moved by Frank, and states “Always I wanted to go inside hot tight man-ass before, but never
quite the heart of a wolf to do, but now—you!”; indicating he wishes to penetrate a man for the first time (42). Frank objects to Morley’s intentions; Morley says “First time for every, man o’ mine and that the jobe cause I say it is”. This line re-asserts his power in their relationship; Morley refers to Frank as a possession, and also makes clear that the master’s word is the law. Morley also suggests that Frank will be changed by being penetrated by him: “Time the first is the bestest best, never to be forgot, and you to believe me. And convert you will be forevermore, therefore” (36). Morley lays out a scenario which mimics his own initial penetration by Baron Everhard:

...under my big black cape, smelling of rich-man-rich, and me hard aboard, and you feeling the final prong in your poor-as-shit life forever, and grateful as hell, and there IS a Gode! I THE LORD, YOU THE SERVANET! Argue with that, Frankyparts! [He drags FRANK off. Blackout]. (43)

Morley’s statement recalling “Gode” (god) implies that the class system is ordained by greater powers and that Morley, as “LORD” is a reference to that system’s structure of power. Frank’s objections to Morley’s will thus presents a challenge to a deeply ingrained, seemingly inalterable system of social order ordained by a supernatural power. Frank’s protests are thus nullified.

Power dynamics are apparent in the sexual positions depicted in these passages. In the play, Morley’s soliloquy appears to map power relations in a similar binary to those identified by Halperin. Everhard, a baron and powerful man, penetrated Morley when he was “just eighteen” and in a position of less control. Morley feels free to penetrate both the
woman he was “given” and later Frank, as both are of the servanet class. Sexual penetration functions as an expression of power both within and across the play’s classes.

Morley claims that Frank will be changed by being penetrated, and that Frank ought to be grateful for the experience. How Frank would change or “convert” is not described, but in a system in which penetration relates to power, the passage suggests that Frank will be disempowered thereafter because he has been penetrated. Frank, feeling the “prong in [his] poor-as-shit life forever,” suggests the experience will have a larger, permanent effect upon him. Morley’s assertion that Frank be grateful for being entered suggests that such an experience will reinforce his position as a servanet, and he should welcome the affirmation of his place. Social place and power are re-inscribed by sexual position, such that to be sexually penetrated is claimed as appropriate to a servanet’s lack of power.

The connections in the play between sexual penetration and power comment on contemporary understandings of homosexuality. At the time of the play’s production, Canadian law had different laws concerning the age of consent for anal and vaginal sex. Robert Brian Howe writes how Robin Badgley, author of Bill C-15 (which, in 1982 created the unequal ages of consent laws), recommended "that anal sex be reserved to those over eighteen on the murky ground that sexual orientation is not established until adulthood" (135). The law presumes that having anal sex at an early age may alter or affect a young man’s sexual orientation. However, the law presumes no danger to a male youth becoming heterosexual by having vaginal sex at an earlier age. The law is clearly aimed at containing male homosexual relations; considering female youth might change their orientation (if they engage in anal sex) is, obviously, not part of the law’s intents. Such understandings associate anal sex with homosexuals. The depiction of the lack of power of a person who
has been anally penetrated thus becomes mapped onto considerations of homosexuals’ agency. That is, if homosexuals are the people who practice anal sex, and thus some are anally penetrated, then a system that disempowers those that are penetrated would likewise consider those homosexuals as disempowered.

While replaying notions concerning power and forms of sexual penetration, the script also evokes the disease metaphor of the four Ds. Frank, by being anally penetrated, is represented as being infected with a disease. The symptom of such a disease appears to be recognition of a perpetually powerless status of the penetrated which recalls that one of the four Ds is “doomed.” The scenario also has echoes of HIV/AIDS metaphors. Unprotected, receptive anal sex is the primary method of transmission of the AIDS virus among gay men, and it may be transmitted after only one penetration (Public; Managingdesire). Morley’s claim that Frank will be changed after he is penetrated reminds a reader of the potential to be doomed as infected with HIV “forever” after only one engagement in unsafe anal sex.

The play’s gay sex is associated with either violence, coercion, or prohibition. Morley’s tryst with Everhard isn’t explicitly portrayed as coercive, but is marked by the power difference between them and the social proscription against it. The paucity of any egalitarian, consensual and positive experiences associated with gay sexuality, considered with other incidences of violence and coercion in the narrative, invites a reader to consider Alexandrowicz’s setting not only as an inhumane place because of the class system, but also a place where gay sexuality is associated with repression. The play’s gay instances appear as part of, and are used to illustrate, a larger discourse about class.


**Conditions of Reception: Media**

Wild Excursions advertised *Beggars* to its potential audience through their blog and with posters and postcards. As an adjunct to the PuSh Festival, the play’s media was also circulated through the festival’s means, in both print and electronic form. As with many small-budget, project-oriented theatre productions, large advertising campaigns are not always feasible. Alexandrowicz writes that he looked to the festival to expand the play’s media and audience horizons (Alexandrowicz, "Final" 1). While the festival provided advertisements which circulated widely, they contained relatively little information about the show, let alone its gay presences. However, the artist’s company website and blog are extensive and provide much contextual background to the production, most of which present the artist’s work as gay cultural production. *Beggars’s* presence in the media appears to operate on two levels, differing in their cost and content. Alexandrowicz’s publicity acknowledges, and at times celebrates, his art as gay cultural production. This publicity is mostly low cost or cost-deferred such as postcards and weblogs. However as part of a large festival, *Beggars’s* media is of considerable greater cost. At this level however, the gay sexuality of the production becomes practically invisible.

**Reputation of Alexandrowicz**

The company website informs that Alexandrowicz is a multi-award winning playwright, director, dancer and choreographer. In 1994 he founded Wild Excursions in Vancouver offering a mandate to create “a physical theatre company whose artistic purpose is to research, develop and present, both locally and on tour, performance works in which movement and original or adapted text are meaningfully inter-related” (*sic*) (Alexandrowicz, “About” 1). The webpage features descriptions of past productions that
signal his work’s incorporating and mixing of a variety of performance styles including physical-theatre, text-based work, and dance. These descriptions, which hint at the gay content of the creator’s work, include: “two men dancing (and doing other things too)” and a “one-act dance-play for two men” (Alexandrowicz, “Past” 1). Gay content and themes are common in Alexandrowicz’s work and a number of his productions explicitly feature homosexuality. His blog compares these past productions to Beggars. “My work in ‘dance,’ or ‘dance-theatre,’ whatever troubled term you care to use, was MUCH MORE overtly queer; or else there was MORE of it” [than appears in Beggars] (Alexandrowicz, “personal” 1).

Alexandrowicz’s most widely seen work is The Wines of Tuscany, which introduced his work to several theatrical markets in Canada. A “one-act physical-theatre duet for men,” it was mounted three times in Vancouver as well as in Calgary, Victoria, Edmonton, and at the Tarragon Theatre in Toronto (Alexandrowicz, “Past” 1). The play’s narrative involved two male lovers on a wine tasting trip to Italy before one of the lovers succumbs to AIDS. The play’s poster featured elements of homoeroticism and camp and thus made explicit to viewers the gay themes associated with Alexandrowicz’s work.

Alexandrowicz himself is open about his own homosexuality and its importance to, and place in, his work. On a personal level he describes himself as “gay as the trees!” (Alexandrowicz, “personal” 1). The company’s website describes his productions as works that “address . . . issues of relationship, gender and power, and the nature of the performance event itself. They often explore issues of relevance to a particular constituency, the community of gay men” (Alexandrowicz, “About” 1). Although not all of his work contains gay themes, their place in many of his creations, gay presences in
the images that support and promote this work, and his company website’s focus on a gay constituency all position his public currency as a theatre creator implicitly associated with homosexuality and its cultural production. His currency differs from that of MacIvor or MacLennan in that while both of these playwrights are gay and create gay plays, neither advertises his work as gay, nor aims it towards a primarily gay audience.

Theatre audiences familiar with Vancouver theatre may well be aware of these associations, as Alexandrowicz’s work has been regularly performed in the lower mainland since 1995, with nine different productions having played in various theatres there. That said, Alexandrowicz’s work, with its avant-garde approach and hybridised theatrical forms, might be considered to have an esoteric appeal which potentially limits its exposure to audiences. Furthermore, his work cannot be easily accessed outside of its actual production. Only one of his works, *The Wines of Tuscany*, has been published. Because dance and movement-based theatrical creations don’t often lend themselves to print publication, the majority of Alexandrowicz’s body of work is not available to the public in script form. As a result of this limited availability, the lower mainland audience’s knowledge of Alexandrowicz’s productions would appear to rely heavily on their familiarity with their local theatrical production. With nine productions however, Alexandrowicz’s work is likely known to local audience members who have maintained a consistent awareness of that theatre culture.

**Wild Excursion’s Media**

The play’s production media and blog contain some information about the play’s sexual themes. The show’s poster and postcards feature photos of Allan Morgan and Damon Calderwood in exaggerated poses. Calderwood, costumed as Rufus, wields a knife towards
a cowering Morgan (as Morley). These photos are superimposed upon an impressionistic painting of an affluent home by Valerie Nelson. This use of her painting was in exchange for a "good chunk" of a $4000 donation given to the company to mount the show (Alexandrowicz, "Final" 1). The callout (or accentuated lettering) "a twisted musical satire about power greed and lust..." hints at some of the play's inherent sexual themes. The play's exaggerated poses and the painting's lurid colours create a distinctly campy effect. The play's poster also features small logos of various arts councils and foundations that have contributed to the show. Other than the campy style of the posture, the poster's suggestive words and Alexandrowicz's name, there is little to suggest the sexual or gay material in the show.

The company blog carried more information about the show than its posters and postcard. One blog entry frames the show as a “raunchy political satire-with-music” about which the playwright adds “I think the music makes the raunch easier to take” (Alexandrowicz, “Blog” Jan. 05). While his term “raunch” suggests sexual content in the show, the blog further contextualises the piece by comparing it to other Vancouver theatrical fare:

Most of the theatre we see in Vancouver is very polite and conventional, especially in matters concerning sex, while this play is raunchy in the extreme, in terms of both hetero and homo sex. The audience will perhaps be shocked, horrified, delighted, appalled, amazed, disgusted-- some combination of the foregoing. We hope they will a) stay to the end; and b) tell their friends they HAVE to see this wild, crazy show. (Alexandrowicz, “Blog” Jan. 05)
The blog indicates the play has homosexual, as well as heterosexual, content but doesn’t differentiate how they will appear in the play. The playwright seems to both warn and entice readers with the passage. The blog sets the work apart from that of other local theatres in terms of sexual content, and also qualifies that content with the term “raunchy”. In reference to the play’s display of sexuality, the playwright suggests that raunch may not lead to a positive play-going experience, in that he comments how music makes the raunch “easier to take”. Yet later in the passage he lists a mixture of both potentially positive and negative audience reactions to the play’s sexual contents, which suggests that he believes either form of sexuality in the play will evoke some form of extra-ordinary reaction. He further indicates that the presence of raunchy sexuality in the play is somewhat of a rare, or out of the ordinary theatrical experience in the Vancouver area.

**PuSh Festival’s Media**

Alexandrowicz's desire to increase his work’s renown and exposure affected a change of venue for the show. On relatively short notice, the production was moved ahead by several months and to a different theatre in order to be included in the PuSh Festival and take advantage of its media apparatus. Alexandrowicz, aware of a "need to add to and diversify [his] audience base," hoped that "we would gain in both box office receipts and attention paid to the show because of its inclusion in the festival" (Alexandrowicz, "Final" 1). The Festival is a curated presentation featuring both international and Canadian works, and has established a strong advertising and media presence in print and electronic form. The Festival published a glossy, thirty two page brochure in addition to bus ads, posters, pamphlets, and e-media. While the posters, pamphlets and ads offered little specific information about *Beggars*, the brochure, websites, and blogs gave descriptions of the show
along with a reproduction of the play's poster. These described the show as featuring a "revolution (with sexual overtones) . . . " without mentioning any other details of the play's sexual themes (PuSh, *International* 23). These media, the brochure, websites, and blogs, appear to borrow content directly from Wild Excursions Performance’s own website. However the line about the company's interests "explor[ing] issues of relevance to a particular constituency, the community of gay men" is not included in the brochure (23).

The tone of the show’s advertisements seems to match the tone of the Festival’s public presentation. The Festival positions itself as avant garde. Yet the Festival also adjudicates its selection for presentation. It claims to offer "very best in contemporary performance," signalling an understanding that work presented has been previously acclaimed. While PuSh is a diverse production in both style and content, the Festival’s large budget and production infrastructure position it to access mainstream audiences. Its advertisements in its brochure feature upscale products as well as opera performances. The brochure opens with laudatory introductions from the Mayor, the Director of BC Arts and the Festival Director, seemingly indicating that the Festival has met with their appropriate approval (PuSh, *International* 2,3). While most of the performances presented in the brochure contain short descriptions in a small font, almost all include large font quotations of glowing press reviews. The overall impression of the Festival that one takes from the brochure is that of a highly professional institution that has sought out and packaged the cream of global and local avant garde theatre, ensuring a middle-to-upper class audience will see quality, distilled choices for entertainment, as opposed to any challenging material. Their advertising for *Beggars*, downplaying its sexual themes, appears in concert with the tone of the festival’s media presentations.
Production Style

As mentioned by the playwright, the play’s style draws on the work of Bertolt Brecht, its music from Brecht’s collaborator Kurt Weill, and also from the cabaret styles of Weimar era Germany (Alexandrowicz, “Script Development” 1; Alexandrowicz, “Additional Notes” 1). As a musical production, the performance also creates various contexts which inform reception and production conditions. In addition to these stylistic elements the play is presented with moments of high camp. While these genres and styles may be considered discrete in some understandings, they also overlap and are interrelated to each other.

These genres all tend to operate with different modes of reception than does realism. Musical theatre may incorporate moments of realism, but when characters break into song to convey emotion, audiences’ suspension of disbelief is taxed. Cabaret’s short musical pieces are not intended to be viewed by their audiences as realistically mimetic representations, but instead representations in cabaret are meant to be viewed as obviously contrived. Brecht’s work often contains moments based in realism, but only until a distancing effect (or v-effekt) of Brecht’s dramaturgy “prevents the audience from losing itself passively and completely in the character created by the actor” (Brecht 91). Camp asks its audience to recognize its skewed, unrealistic representations as a way of commenting on culture. Due to the use of these theatrical genres and styles, an audience’s reception of the play likely differs from those of His Greatness, or The Shooting Stage. The employment of these genres may also influence the audience’s reception of the play’s homosexual themes.
Cabaret

Weimar-era cabaret is known for a number of styles and themes: some of which are used in Beggars’s production. Tedrick writes generally about the term cabaret: “throughout history, cabaret’s normal state is an insular subculture of sorts and one that is generally intellectual, intimate, and interactive in nature” (3). She is more specific when discussing Weimar era production: “The element of political satire and current event commentary created the atmosphere of intellectual camaraderie that the . . . European public loved. . . . Its openly gay clientele and artisans were a fascinating feature for tourists during this era of decadence” (Tedrick 44). This cabaret “was decadent, lascivious, and lewd, as it integrated all the lack of censorship freedoms offered by the government . . .” It remained topical and usually dealt with contemporary society and political and social commentary: “German cabaret during the Weimar Era bit hard . . . at the establishment” (Tedrick 45). Beggars’s bawdiness, its attack on capitalism (at a time when Vancouver was debating the value of the Olympics games), its gay content, and its mix of songs and varying styles of acting all borrow from the conventions of Weimar cabaret. Beggars’s production on Granville Island also reflects Weimar cabaret’s “fascinating feature for tourists,” as the area is a primary attraction to Vancouver’s tourists.

German cabaret was also “enamored with sexual content, particularly homosexual themes . . . [its] humor was lewd and the performances bawdy . . .” (Tedrick 45). The term cabaret also has popular appeal as a result of the 1972 film Cabaret (based on a stage musical of the same name, the play I am a Camera, and the novel Goodbye to Berlin). Cabaret is a well-known part of contemporary entertainment culture and as such, has popularised an association between its themes of homosexuality and Weimar-era cabaret.
performance. To a potential audience, references to the play as cabaret may read as code for its homosexual themes.

Cabaret also has a history of informality – seen through its accompaniment of eating and drinking in the venues where it originated. While eating and drinking are not common in Canadian theatrical spaces, audience informality is often created through a lowered fourth wall and intimacy with the audience. Waterfront’s utilitarian space, while it allows for close contact to the stage only in its front rows, does not provide the same degree of informality as would a night-club (where cabaret performances are often found). However, the play’s production has a number of moments of audience interaction typical of cabaret. These include a direct audience address and a breaking of the fourth wall.

**Brecht**

Reviewer Peter Birnie’s notes that *Beggars* is a “Kurt Weill-style German cabaret”. This comment informs of the play’s Brechtian style. Kurt Weill was Brecht’s collaborator on early musicals, including *Three Penny Opera*, for which he wrote the music for Brecht’s lyrics. Scholars such as Ferran have also written about Brecht’s use of Weimar cabaret style and performers, and their importance in his production of “epic” theatre. Ferran asserts “cabaret performance style defines [*Three Penny Opera’s*] overall lyrical gestus” (Ferran 21). The play’s incorporation of a “Kurt Weill-style German cabaret” style references both Brecht’s partner and also his stylistic influences. Furthermore, Brecht’s theatre is distinctly political and his works often address capitalism, war, and issues of fairness, poverty, and equality. Both amateur and professional theatre companies regularly mount Brecht’s works in North America, and thus Alexandrowicz’s incorporation of Brecht’s theatrical style and
themes would likely be recognised by most regular theatre-goers. Beggars’s similar thematic material is thus apt for a Brecht-style production.

Brecht’s epic theatre has other stylistic conventions that Alexandrowicz utilizes in his production of Beggars. In his works, Brecht used a variety of devices such as placards, juxtaposition, direct audience address, and narration in order to achieve a v-effekt. These were intended to shift an audience away from their emotional involvement in the narrative in order to assess the meanings and politics of the story and gain a critical perspective.

Beggars incorporates several of these devices. For example, Beggars’s final scene opens with the Ballad Singer announcing the mechanics of the narrative, making an abrupt change in the dramatic presentation of the play. Having a character step in and out of his or her role, and showing the mechanics of a production (by announcing aspects of narrative rather than dramatizing them), are typical Brechtian distancing devices.

While contemporary audiences may directly recognize Brechtian styles in a play, a question comes about as to whether Brecht’s alienation effect will affect a modern audience as Brecht intended. Brecht’s ideas in constructing this kind of theatre came about in a theatrical climate much different than today’s. In the 1920s, Weimar-era Germany’s economy had been devastated mostly from war reparations paid under war guilt clauses of The Treaty of Versailles. This contributed to unemployment and class disparity becoming crippling social problems, and causing much social unrest and political strife. Brecht’s alienation effect was intended to thwart what Brecht believed were passive emotional responses that conventional theatre (at that time) created in their audiences (Furst 33-42). Brecht believed that performance of that time failed to motivate audiences to directly react to the subjects presented to them. He intended to create a theatre that could, in theory,
promote social awareness and incite his audience to the political action that the times required. However, many of Brecht’s alienation devices (direct audience address, the breaking of a fourth wall, mixed media signs, and musical interludes) are now common in contemporary theatre and so an audience is likely familiar with such practices. Thus, these familiar forms may not evoke the same effect that Brecht’s unconventional forms were intended to during the twenties and thirties, when first introduced.

Nevertheless, as in much of Brecht’s work, Beggars’s political discourses are obvious and easily accessible to an audience. Beggars’s broad critique of capitalism and class structure could promote an examination of an audience’s local systems of classifying citizens into various factions. The play’s discourses thus could be viewed as castigating any number of systems, ranging from those based on sexual orientation, race, opportunity or income.

Camp

Throughout the play, the production creates a gay presence in the form of a campy aesthetic evident throughout the play but perhaps most pronounced in its costume design and in various acting and directing choices. Some of these instances are not present in the script’s text, but are evident in an archival, single-camera video recording of the play shot by Patrick Harrison. Camp, as an aesthetic, has a long association with queerness and gay themes. So much so is this the case that many consider it the gay aesthetic. In Susan Sontag’s renowned work from 1964, “Notes on Camp”, she explains “[w]hile it's not true that Camp taste is homosexual taste, there is no doubt a peculiar affinity and overlap” (Sontag 51). More contemporary writing refines these associations: David Bergman notes that camp is an “important [topic] for understanding gay literature and culture” (Bergman
3. Babuscio goes further, and claims a kind of gay ownership to the idea; “[t]he term camp describes those elements in a person, situation, or activity that express, or are created by a gay sensibility” (Babuscio 20). Moe Meyer gives a broad definition, calling it “queer parody” but also describes it as a “solely queer discourse” (Meyer 1). Regardless of camp’s exact relation to gay men, most scholars agree that camp’s origins lie in the social and historical milieu of gay male culture.

The stylistic codes of camp allow for an alternative, or “inside” perspective: one that often allows for a gay viewing to consider alternative meanings in a subject or text (Bergman 13). In rudimentary terms, camp celebrates elements of artifice, irony, incongruity, and excess in a subject or text. A campy presence may particularly be seen when these elements appear in or affect normativelygendered codes of appearance and behaviour. When codings of masculinity and femininity are mixed incongruously in a single text, normative readings are blurred which allows for a camp reading of the text. Excess in gendered appearances without mixed gender codings is also a part of camp. Sontag writes: “[a]llied to the Camp taste for the androgynous is something that seems quite different but isn’t: a relish for the exaggeration of sexual characteristics and personality mannerisms” (9). In aspects of the production of Beggars, excess, artifice and incongruity all can create ironic readings; these readings tend to invite a reception of them with a camp aesthetic.

Morley’s character appears in a costume comprised of black boots, pants, a vest, a white shirt, a topcoat, an ascot, and finally, a large white handkerchief that rarely leaves his hand over the course of the play. While his boots and the cut of his vest, shirt, and jacket all appear to code for a reading of aristocracy and masculinity, certain details offer the
audience other readings. The garish colours and patterns of his jacket, vest, and ascot would likely be considered to clash in most contemporary fashion sensibilities. While ascots are generally associated with gentility or upper class men and their leisurely pursuits, the excessive size and brilliant crimson colour in this scene would likely draw the audience’s attention and suggest a clash. An audience might presume that the Nobelesses’ wherewithal and position would allow them to assume a degree of refinement in matters of taste, yet Morley’s costume presents an opposing view as it verges on the absurd in its excesses.

Morley’s comportment is also quite campy. A white handkerchief flows out of his hand in constant, exaggerated gestures, evoking the gay stereotype of the limp wrist. His body also moves in graceful, yet exaggerated flowing motions. While his movements appear refined, perhaps to be expected of his dominant class, their exaggerations evoke the effeminate “swishy” and “mincing” stereotypes supposed of gay men. As such his body language seems incongruous with his position of power, as commonplace narratives tend to associate power with masculine ideals, images and behaviours (Mosse 4). Morley’s scripted character reads as a perverse and ruthless tyrant; yet his costume and stage mannerisms introduce a campy aesthetic that appears to counter his threatening image. Many of his more sinister actions, presented in this costume with campy mannerisms, are met by the audience with laughter. Morley’s overall presentation also recalls the Wildean model in terms of class, costume, and overall effeteness.

Ravinia’s character is also presented in a campy manner through costume, make-up and acting or directing choices. Her costume consists of a blouse, which frames and accentuates her exposed cleavage, a floral skirt, a petticoat underneath the skirt, and high-topped, beige, Converse running shoes. An oversized jewel hangs at the top of her cleavage,
and her hair is dyed an unnatural, fluorescent red. Her lipstick is a similar colour of red, and is drawn on an area larger than her lips. Her eyes are made up with a metallic, blue eye-shadow which covers a large area surrounding her eyes. While her skirt and blouse appear to be expensive garments appropriate to an aristocratic class, the colours are garish, with a predominance of red, including her overdrawn lipstick and hair-colour. Her make-up, hair and accentuated bosom all read as gender-coded styles associated with western women’s fashion, yet their extremes in colour and proportion are excessive, and may remind the audience of similar excesses adopted by drag-queens. This similarity is interesting considering that drag disrupts the conventional gendering of behaviours and appearances. As with a drag queen, the exaggerated presentation of the gendered elements of her costume reveals the artifice of its stylistic elements. This excess in her costume creates a campy interpretation of an aristocratic woman.

Ravinia’s Converse running shoes create a particular note of irony. Her other garments all might be considered appropriate to her station. Yet her athletic shoes contrast with this presentation. Furthermore her style of running shoe is considered inexpensive and carries pop-cultural associations with punk and grunge music subcultures which are associated with anarchistic and socialist sympathies. These associations with her footwear are ironic when read against the context of her aristocratic station.

Ravinia’s comportment is also ironic in regards to her position and gender. While her costume accentuates femaleness with its excesses in various gendered elements, her body movements can be read as particularly masculine. She moves with abrupt, bullish gestures, often jumping on tables and chairs. When she sits, she splays her legs wide, with her feet pointed upwards and her voluminous skirt and petticoat hanging between her legs.
Her seated posture goes against contemporary Western etiquette in terms of women’s carriage in which the genteel woman holds her legs together. The irony of her carriage, in light of both her gender and her social class, presents Ravinia as a figure of camp, and often evokes laughter from the audience.

*Beggars’s* presentation of the Nobelesse characters as campy is exaggerated by the contrasting lack of excess and artifice in the servanet’s portrayals. Their three costumes are all in either black, dark brown, or dark grey with black utility boots. None appears to wear any discernable make-up and there is no aspect of any of their costumes or appearance that is particularly accentuated. None of them would look out of place on “the other side of the curtain” in the theatre. The ordinariness of their appearance may invite audiences to empathise with them. The similarity of their costumes to everyday garb could imply to audience members that in the world of the play they too would be servanets.

The actors playing the servanets also have a performative style that is different from that of the Nobelesse. While the servanets do express themselves with a degree of physicality, their gestures are more restrained than the characters from the Nobelesse. When servanets veer from a realistic performance style, the intent is Brechtian. For example, at times they address the audience directly, breaking the narrative in way that harkens to Brecht’s verfremdungseffekt.

Two questions arise from Alexandrowicz’s use of camp in the play. Does the audience recognise the campy elements as camp? And secondly, does the audience connect the camp with a gay presence? Historically camp has been seen as the purview of gay men’s sensibilities, and was often ill considered: “camp languished, theorized as a shameful sign of an unrecognised self hating” (Tyler 33). However Bergman believes that with post-
structuralist theory, camp has been rehabilitated and is used to comment on a wide variety of gender and cultural issues, and has expanded from its origins as a predominately gay male aesthetic (9-10). Furthermore camp, and along with it, gay subculture have been popularised and integrated to a certain degree into the mainstream in the last twenty years. As such camp’s codes and aesthetic are now much more widely recognised and appreciated. Television shows such as *Will and Grace* and *Ugly Betty* consistently broadcasted a camp sensibility to a wide audience, where, judging by these shows’ successes, it was appreciated. In *Beggars*, the audience’s reaction of laughter to both Morley and Ravinia’s performances informs of their reception of the play’s camp elements. As Sontag notes, “[c]amp is playful . . . [c]amp taste is, above all, a mode of enjoyment” (Sontag 40, 55). The appreciation of camp largely relies on an audience’s ability to find humour in its reception. Scott Long writes that this reception is vital to camp’s meaning; if “[t]he camp moment is incomplete, it is not camp, without the satisfactory response from the audience” (Long 80). *Beggars*’ campy instances appear to be appreciated given the laughter they provoke from the audience. However, whether the audience actually discerns these moments as a gay presence or with a gay provenance is unknown. Popular culture may have appropriated campy sensibilities into much contemporary entertainment, but determining whether an audience recognises a gay presence in such entertainment is difficult to discern.

Moe Meyer claims that Sontag’s discussion of camp, and its subsequent embrace by pop culture appears to have erased much of the homosexual “binding reference” from camp, and consequently much discourse concerning “camp” became unravelled to be confused with satire, irony or kitsch (Meyer 7). (Alexandrowicz’s promotion of *Beggars*’s as a satire may be seen as an example of this kind of confusion.) Meyer writes that to
understand camp as a sensibility requires an acknowledgement not of objective instances of camp, but their subjective formation as a sign. In such a way, even when queer provenance of camp is seemingly missing, by looking to a “performance oriented methodology that privileges process, we can restore a knowledgeable queer social agent to the discourse of camp . . .” (Meyer 10). Analysing Beggars’s campiness in terms of not only what occurs onstage, but in light of how its signs operate with their audience, and the processes through which they may read as camp, informs on the signs’ potential to code and mean as gay presences. The audience’s appreciations of the play’s moments of camp (such as Morley’s movements with his handkerchief) by laughing or clapping, indicate that they understand the camp’s gay provenance and thus complete the camp’s subjective formation as a sign. In other words, the audience indicates, through its responses, that it reads the gender and sexual dissonance in the play’s camp moments. In this regard, Ravinia and Morley’s comportment, costume, and performance seemingly evoke a queer perception and understanding from their viewers.

Programming

The Waterfront Theatre’s programming varies widely, featuring theatre, spoken word, dance, music, comedy, as well as exhibitions, children’s fare and art showings. The theatre is home to the Carousel Theatre Company, a professional theatre for young audiences. However the theatre mostly operates as a rental space and dramatic works presented there are usually amateur productions (“Waterfront”, techspecs). In 2007 the theatre housed four Canadian plays, one French farce, two Shakespeare productions, one American play and a local Noh production. Of these plays only Scorched and the Shape of Things could be considered material for adult audiences (the former features depictions of
sexual assault and incest, while the latter shows the body objectification of a young male taken to extremes of humiliation and cosmetic surgery). However, in the past six years a number of amateur, gay-themed shows have played at the theatre, notably *Happy Birthday*, *Take Me Out*, and *Jeffrey* (*Happy Birthday* features a day in the life of three gay men, *Take Me Out* is concerned with a professional baseball player who comes out as gay, and *Jeffrey* concerns a HIV negative man looking for love in the midst of AIDS crisis of the early 1990s). Two of these shows had posters that were rejected for their sexual content, as mentioned in Chapter One. These rejections referred to the theatre’s location being associated with family attractions and children’s fare (Blue). The theatre’s programming reflects the physical attributes of the theatre, providing a space for companies with meagre funds and equipment requirements. Its rental terms appear to be neutral in terms of promoting or framing any theatrical content (“Waterfront”, Rental). However its history of censoring advertisements indicates that sensibilities of family are promoted over other considerations.

**Geographical and Material Aspects**

The Waterfront Theatre is located on Granville Island, the same public space where *His Greatness* was performed. Alexandrowicz chose the space from a number of sites booked by the PuSh Festival, maintaining that he wanted to “stay on Granville island,” (among other festival shows) presumably due to the area’s familiarity among theatre-goers (Alexandrowicz, “Final” 1). However, the space may have been a less than ideal site, and its material aspects may not have contributed appropriate contexts the play’s meanings. The theatre itself is housed in the former Tyee Machinery Building, which was converted to its present form in 1979. The theatre has traces of its industrial beginnings, with some rough-
hewn beams visible inside, but its exterior has been modernized with metal and plexiglas awnings with bright blue and yellow accents. At the south-west end of Granville Island, it doesn’t share the views to the sea and the dramatic cityscape that the Arts Club theatre patrons enjoy. The theatre is beside a children’s facility and Granville Island Toy Company. As was the case with the Arts Club’s location, Granville Island evokes ideas of a cultural and meeting place. However, its proximity to children’s facilities and its place on the main avenue of the island create less of a sense of opulence than does the Arts Club, but rather that of a family, and also of a commercial space.

The theatre is a non-IATSE house and operates predominantly as a rental venue, requiring renters to use the theatre’s own tech personnel (“Waterfront,” *Rental*). Non-profit attractions rent the space at a reduced rate, on a sliding scale, dependent on attendance. Wild Excursions is a both a “BC-registered non-profit society and a federally registered charity” and accordingly, paid a reduced rate for the space (Alexandrowicz, “queries” 1).

The building has a public lobby with art work, concession stand and a small box office in addition to the theatre space itself. The performance space is a medium-sized venue with seating for 224 patrons. The seats are arranged in fourteen steeply raked rows of sixteen chairs. The chairs are cloth covered, with armrests, and are affixed in one direction in front of the stage’s “fourth wall” (*Waterfront, techspecs*). The space’s narrowness, in relation to its height, allows a viewer to either gain close proximity to a performance from the front rows, or to be quite distanced, both vertically and horizontally from the stage. Furthermore the shape requires patrons sitting in the back half of the theatre to gaze down through a seemingly narrow vista to the stage. Alexandrowicz’s lighting designer, Itai Erdal, points out a problem with this design: “the house is too big and the stage is too
small” (Alexandrowicz, “Final” 1). Like the Arts Club, the space doesn’t allow for much flexibility in terms of production design. Audiences can face the stage at only one angle, similar to a proscenium arch configuration. However, the large stage area, the same width as the audience area, doesn’t allow for the full picture-frame effect of a proscenium arch. This design is likely to allow the widest possible stage area for concerts or other performances that require no wings. Legs can be hung above the stage to allow more wing area, as happened with Beggars’s production, but this cuts down on the visible stage space. The walls of the theatre seating area are unadorned and painted a simple red; around the stage they are black. Renters need to bring in their own stage pieces, built elsewhere to furnish their set, or to build and install their show during booked time.

The utilitarian design of the space appears to offer a low-maintenance facility that can provide for performances that require a unidirectionally focused audience, an accommodation for varying sized audiences (as rent is based on attendance), in-house lighting and sound with operators, and a minimal set-build or load in. Its utilitarian features create an impression of a commercial space, yet one that is available for low-budget productions. Alexandrowicz’s project-based theatre may seem a natural fit for this kind of space, considering Beggars’s relatively small set requirements. Yet Alexandrowicz’s work is framed as professional and avant garde, unlike much of the space’s programming. Furthermore, his usual audience may have been unfamiliar with the particular space because his previous works played at other venues, notably Performance Works and the Firehall (which are better known for their presenting of professional work). The play’s gay and sexual themes may have also seemed out of place or, given the history of the space’s
censoring of past posters, constrained by an area that is both oriented to amateur production and has a close proximity to children’s spaces.

**Temporal Aspects**

Commenting on the play’s final workshop, Alexandrowicz noted that his audience appreciated the “timely subject of the piece, [and] its universality” (Alexandrowicz, “Development” 1). The “timely subject” of the piece likely refers to the overt class conflict the play features as the central theme of its narrative. Vancouver at the time had recently held a ballot that questioned “Do you support or do you oppose the City of Vancouver's participation in hosting the 2010 Olympic Winter Games and Paralympic Winter Games?” (Olympic). Issues surrounding the public expenditure of funds for the Olympics, often tied to concerns about the poverty of the DTES, were commonplace in the media (Garr; Mason; Ramsey). In a number of articles from this period, Vancouver was criticized for becoming a city of elites where even upper middle-class citizens could not afford to live due to development arising from the coming Olympics. While Vancouver has been known as an expensive city since the early eighties (when the elimination of the National Housing Policy began) the Olympics were considered another in a long line of developments that had consecutively altered the city’s affordability, including Expo ’86, a large influx of “economic refugees” from Hong Kong facilitated by Mulroney-era investment laws, and massive gentrification (Gaetz 22; Brunet 19). The notorious presence of the DTES led many in the media to ask whether the Olympics were a worthy expenditure when the social problems of the area were so pronounced. *Beggars*’ themes of class disparity echo these concerns. The “timeliness” of the play’s subject matter likely refers to the focus on class disparity in both the play and in media coverage of Vancouver’s social strata at the time.
Stage and Set

*Beggars* used a relatively simple, but detailed set for its production. Using a riser, a painted backdrop and floor cloth, exaggerated lighting choices, and a few chairs the production created a campy, exaggerated, non-realistic setting. The set was divided into two halves. On stage right the servanets’ space was marked by a neutral floor, out of which rose a lush backdrop painted with over-sized flowers and vegetation in bright, natural colours. On stage left, the Nobelesse space consisted of an ornately edged riser, reminiscent of an over-sized lid of a grand piano. Its backdrop was painted with a forced perspective view of a massive row of Doric columns. The divide between the servanet’s space, associated with nature, and the Nobelesse space, associated with the social contributes to the play’s camp aesthetic through its exaggerated forms and lurid lighting.

Program

*Beggars*’s program is eight pages long, printed on high quality paper, with well-reproduced black and white graphics. It contains little information about the sexual explicitness of the show. The program displays the show’s poster on its first page with the title, author, showtimes and addresses. Its second page has writer’s notes to contextualize the show. However these only offer the history of development in terms of its class conflict, and a glossary of some of the play’s terms. All these terms relate to the play’s class conceit, offering background details to the play’s social structures.

The program lists the actors and production team, indicating that all performers, except the onstage musician, are members of Equity and thus are professionals. The play’s eleven songs are then listed, from which an audience member might get a sense of the show. Listed are “The Song of Sexual Satisfaction”, “Bums in Silken Linen” and “A
Barrel-load of Shit” which give some indication of the play’s sexual and bawdy themes (Program, *Beggars* 3). The biographies in the *Beggars*’ program are structured in a similar way to those of *The Shooting Stage* discussed in Chapter Two. All the actors list extensive experience, with a few mentioning previous work with Alexandrowicz. Many express emotions about working on the show and include personal details. This again, allows an audience member to consider them outside the performance, and alters the theatrical distance between the performer and the audience.

**Critical reception**

*Beggars* gained mostly positive reviews in print media. These reviews tended to frame the production in terms of its predominant themes of social politics and often categorised its sexual themes as merely raunchy or risqué elements with little or no elaboration. Notably, the word “raunch” appeared in a number of reviews, suggesting that the reviewers looked to Wild Excursion’s media when writing their reviews. Peter Birnie (*The Vancouver Sun*) was the only reviewer to explicitly mention same-sex themes when he referred to Morley’s “blighted bisexuality,” which he referred to as “creepy” (Birnie “Raunchy”). However he did mention that the play’s “grotesque groping gets downright R-rated,” warning it was not for “children or prudes”. He wrote that the music and singing are noteworthy and “cabaret flavoured.” His review referred to the play’s class warfare as its central theme. As he identified the play’s style, calling it “an exhilarating update of Kurt Weill-style German cabaret,” he also focused on the play’s comedy, labelling sections “a laugh out loud spoof on stinking rich stupidity” (Birnie “Raunchy”). Colin Thomas (*Georgia Strait*) mentioned the play’s songs as the best part of the play, noting those about sexuality are “disgusting treats” (“Beggars”). He briefly mentioned a scene where Morley
wipes semen off his privates and then sniffs it but the reviewer fails to mention the play’s same-sex themes. He identifies the acting as bouffon, and notes the music sounds like Kurt Weill. Like Birnie, he lauds the performances but finds the play’s central themes, its class politics, “crudely presented.”

*The Vancouver Courier*’s Jo Ledingham opened her review with the phrase “Raunchy, rude and bawdy” (“Smart”). Her review revealed the most about the play’s sexual themes, but again referred to them obliquely. Using descriptors like “raw sexiness”, “naughty bits”, “pelvic-thrusting”, as well as a number of Alexandrowicz’s own phrases from the play, she communicated the show’s sexual themes in a way that seemed to prepare a viewer for offense or titillation, yet her descriptions were simultaneously and seemingly purposely vague. She also noted that some members of the audience walked out, thereby interrupting the performance. She recognized the style of Brecht and Weill, and summarised found the show both intelligent and hilarious (Ledingham, “Smart”).

The overall impression one takes from the play’s critical reception is that the reviewers found the play bawdy. These perceptions are contextualised as both coming out of, and appropriate to, the stylistic form(s) of the play. The critics’ perceptions tended to only touch marginally on any sexual themes specifically (let alone any gay themes) through vague codings like the words “raunch” or “naughty bits.” Other than Morley wiping his genitalia, no sexuality or specific sexual themes are discussed in any review. In this way the reviews present the play as a kind of salacious enigma. While their descriptions imply that the play may titillate, they keep the nature of the play’s sexually explicit material mostly unavailable to a reader.
Conditions of Production: Script Development

*Beggars*’s script and its instances of gay sexuality change significantly over the course of the play’s development. In the play’s initial forms, gay sexuality was a part of a pan-sexual assault on the lower classes, and also appears to have been scripted to be staged. As the play developed over various workshops, gay sexuality was present in the form of individual dramatic narratives, discussed in detail and used as a measure to mark and control class. Furthermore gay sexuality was no longer staged, but rather left to the audiences’ imagination as either an imminent development taking place in blackout, or a narrative described in detailed reminiscences. However as the play developed, stylistic elements of cabaret and camp made gay presences more manifest in the script.

The playwright comments on the origins of *Beggars* in his blog:

This play began its life almost twenty years ago in Toronto as a dance-theatre piece. We had one tiny Canada Council grant to create and mount the piece. Scored for a cast of five dancers and two actors, it was set in a surreal restaurant somewhere. The dancers played the waiters and the actors two utterly spoiled and horrific customers (sic). The text was fourteen pages long. (Alexandrowicz, “Wild” Jan. 10)

At this early point, the play’s fundamental ideas of class disparity are in place, represented by the waiters and customers. Conceived as a movement-piece, the play then evolved over the course of two workshops in 2005 and 2006 to become a music and text-based work before its full production in 2007. In terms of form, the original play “entailed a number of rhythmic chants and one song” with a “cast of five dancers and two actors” (Alexandrowicz, “Writer’s” 1). Alexandrowicz notes, however, that he had always wanted
to “rewrite it for a cast composed entirely of actors and to add to the musical dimension of the piece” (Alexandrowicz, *Writer’s 1*). He is quoted as needing “to expand [Beggars] into a full length play set in some strange, dystopic world that is like a feudal society where you have owners and servants. It’s basically a satirical comedy about masters and slaves” (Derdeyn 2). Although the play has changed radically from its initial form, homosexual presences have been in *Beggars Would Ride* from early its inception. These develop out of earlier drafts’ pan-sexual exploitation to become more pronounced in later drafts.

Alexandrowicz writes that even in its earliest stages “the sexual content between Frank and Morley was always there” (Alexandrowicz, *BWR 1*). While the author states that no texts remain of the original piece he recalls portions of the work that describe moments of gay sexuality in the play:

In the original version the stage directions for the big abuse scene are as follows: “HE and SHE take turns violating the waiters. Each waiter is held in place by the others. This escalates into an abandoned bacchanal which leaves the couple in a senseless stupor and the waiters exhausted.” I seem to recall that it was all kind[s] of pansexual mayhem. I don’t recall any special attention being paid to him raping one of the male waiters. (Alexandrowicz, *BWR 1*)

The play’s sexuality at this point already appears brutal, non-consensual and used as a tool to reinforce the class power structure. While waiters of both genders are raped, the playwright makes a comment about a lack of “any special attention being paid to him raping one of the male waiters”. This suggests the author intends that homosexuality in this
scene is not differentiated from heterosexuality in terms of its invocation as a tool of repression.

Alexandrowicz wrote and workshopped a new draft in 2005. The workshop was funded by the BC Arts Council, The Hamber Foundation, and BC Gaming. This process culminated with a staged reading for the public. In the draft brought to this workshop, Alexandrowicz made the homosexuality of the two characters more defined and nuanced. He notes that “the decision to make Morley gay or bi—he seems to like being gay for the pleasure and being straight for the ego gratification of reproducing—and Frank hiding the fact that he is gay, I’m pretty sure was there in the first full-length draft I brought to the workshop in May of ‘05” (Alexandrowicz, BWR 1). The play’s second workshop occurred the next year, from June 12 to 16, 2006. It was supported by the Theatre Section of The Canada Council and BC Gaming.

The play’s gay presences evolve over its development. The play’s use of gay sexuality as a tool of oppression remains, but gay sex also becomes a means of usurpation. During development, the playwright creates and refines gay identities; however, some stagings of sexuality disappear. The playwright comments on this; “I found myself quite taken aback by the risky nature of some of the scenes, given that I was also the person who had to worry about things like attendance and reviews! We were all, including me, amazed at how peculiarly explicit the erotic content of the show turned out to be” (Alexandrowicz, “Final” 2). By the time of the play’s production, all depictions of sex occur in blackouts or offstage. Sex is mentioned often in the play’s idiomatic language, and Morley and Frank relate their sexual histories with men in some detail directly to the audience, but actual
sexual contact is not seen onstage. At the moment Frank is about to be raped, the coup occurs and Frank is spared.

**Audience**

In his blog the playwright comments about his audience and its reactions. His initial choice of moving the play’s venue is motivated by his desire to increase his audience. Alexandrowicz’s acknowledgement that he “need[s] to add to and diversify [his] audience base” suggests that his work has constituted a particular audience, and that he desires that it expand (Alexandrowicz, "Final" 1). The esoteric nature of Alexandrowicz’s work and his reputation for movement based performance appeals to a select audience. Not only does dance have a smaller attendance than do dramatic forms of theatre in Canada, but Alexandrowicz’s avant garde melding of genres further marginalizes his work from the mainstream. An audience that is familiar with his work would be aware of his repertoire’s gay themes. With the production of *Beggars* at PuSh, Alexandrowicz had the possibility to broaden his audience to expand from his base to include Festival attendees who may not have seen one of his productions. The latter group, depending on the media they access, could enter the theatre with either a fairly informed understanding of the gay and sexual themes of the production (if they accessed Alexandrowicz’s e-media) or expecting a production featuring music, cabaret, with perhaps a camp aesthetic (if they only accessed festival media). Those that read the plays’ reviews would bring an expectation of bawdy themes, but due to the critics’ vagueness in their responses, little other detail. Due to the differences between the ways various media and other reception conditions framed the play, the play’s gay contents may create meaning to various audience members in differing ways.
The Festival’s advertising appears to be aimed at a more mainstream audience than that of Alexandrowicz’s previous works. Attributes of the theatre, its location and the play’s inclusion in a well-funded festival may lead to an unfamiliar audience finding the work’s Brechtian attack on class structures, including its depiction of marginalized homosexuality, more interventionist than their horizon of expectation would have led them to believe. The play’s overt attack on class systems may be read as a comment on some of the members of audience that Alexandrowicz hoped to attract. As the play weaves some of its gay themes with its class discourses, a provocation of the audience through references to sexuality or political content may operate as a distancing device. This potentially could stop the audience member from “losing [him]self passively” in the narrative and analysing the social issues of the play (Brecht 91). It may also simply offend and give cause to leave the theatre, as Alexandrowicz admits occurred. He comments that he wanted that *Beggars* be provocative in this regard. He believes the play’s depiction of sexual themes, and specifically the assault on a male victim, as opposed to a female, had a certain effect on audiences. In his Final Report to the BC Arts Council he writes:

> Some people were not so thrilled [with the extreme bawdiness of the show]: during our one previews a whole crowd of six or seven people got up and walked out the side door of the theatre, leaving it open! (… I believe it is significant that this took place during the scene in which a homosexual seduction/coercion was taking place; I doubt they would have left if the scene in question had involved a heterosexual relationship.)

(Alexandrowicz, "Final 3)
One can speculate on reasons for this reaction. An audience member expecting no homosexuality in the play could be surprised by its presence. If such a person took offense to the play’s gay presences (which Alexandrowicz considers), that member may also have summarily dismissed the play’s other political themes. Those that chose to walk out likely found little to value in the play.

However the wider conditions of production and reception offer ample clues that the play is risqué and a certain amount of provocation is to be expected. The varying framings through which the play is contextualised in media, be they bouffon, satire, cabaret, spoof, camp or even Brecht/Weill, set up expectations that the play would likely have humorous content. Even if an audience member only looked to the Festival’s program, its vague descriptors create this expectation. Thus an audience likely enters the theatre expecting that the sexual, risqué, and political material is to be appreciated as both provocative and humorous. Most theatre goers do not expect to witness material that completely replays their own ideologies. Additionally most theatrical styles offer some exploration in terms of the various issues and viewpoints inherent in their themes, as conflicts between them create drama. But Beggars’s extreme perspective on issues of class and capitalism may be considered biased. Beggars’s bawdy, risqué or overtly sexual moments are inherently part of the play’s political discourse addressing marginalisation and disempowerment. Much in the way the play utilises an exaggerated form of our system of capitalism, the production also creates a potential for its narrative’s depiction of homosexuality to be read as replaying and exaggerating the ways in which homosexuality may be considered in some areas of mainstream, contemporary Canada. As the play’s depiction of the Wildean model and the
four Ds appear mixed in with the play’s class narrative, they may also be seen as an exaggeration of a dominant hegemony’s control over gay expression and social position.

To Alexandrowicz’s core audience, familiar with the gay themes of his work, the play potentially creates other meanings. This audience’s familiarity with gay subculture may allow them to recognize the twink or trade type in the play. Frank’s exploitation by both his own class and by the Nobelesse may be seen as another of the play’s discourses on marginalized peoples. Like the servanets’ position, which comments on class, and the play’s sanctions against gay sex, which comment on contemporary positions of gays, the play’s depiction of Frank as a twink or trade allows a discourse on how gay men categorise and exploit each other. To a gay member of an audience, Frank’s depiction allows a critique on gay culture originating from a gay perspective.

Alexandrowicz admits that “audience numbers were disappointing,” offering that “there is simply not a big enough audience in Vancouver for challenging performance forms” in these circumstances (Alexandrowicz, “Additional notes” 1). It is clear his intention to expand from his audience-base was not entirely successful, and that he failed to gain a more mainstream audience.

**Summary and Conclusion**

Most aspects of the production of *Beggars Would Ride* are at some distance from those used in the more mainstream production of *His Greatness* and, to a lesser extent, *The Shooting Stage*. These aspects are mostly typical of an example of project-based theatre as almost all reflect the smaller budgets available to this kind of performance. However, two aspects of the play’s production do position the play somewhat closer to mainstream practice. The play’s performance at the Waterfront Theatre likely brought the play closer to
a mainstream audience due to its location in a tourist area. As the playwright asserted, this was an intentional move in order to expand his viewer base. Given that Alexandrowicz’s work had previously been seen on the stages of the Vancouver East Cultural Centre (an alternative theatre one block off East Hastings) it is likely that the performance at the less intimate Waterfront Theatre created more theatrical distance from its audience than had his earlier performances. The inclusion in the PuSh Festival, with its large budget (app $750,000 in 2007) allowed the play to be considered amongst a number of international, previously successful works (PuSh, PROFILE 6). It also allowed some large scale advertising for the play. In these ways the play’s production exists both near to mainstream production in some terms, and distanced from it in other ways. The production also appears to be somewhat liberal in portraying gay themes at times, but is simultaneously conservative at others.

_Beggars Would Ride_ presents gayness in a number of ways. In its text, the two main characters express gay desire in complex narratives that at times borrow from the twentieth century motifs of the Wildean model and the four Ds. These characters’ relationship also is evocative of the gay-subcultural types of the twink and trade, and thus may encourage a gay gaze. The gay sexuality present in the text is ultimately associated with violence, coercion and prohibition. Gay sexuality further makes for a crucial plot detail as gay desire is manipulated to help overthrow the dominant social order. The play’s subversive themes of revolution contextualise the four Ds as part of an exaggerated and inhumane world. While the play discusses gay sex in much more depth than does _His Greatness or The Shooting Stage_, the play’s specific instances of gay sex occur in blackouts or offstage, creating less “embodied homosexualities” than does _The Shooting Stage_. Furthermore the language used
to discuss gay sex is heightened, and its poetic otherness likely creates distance from its graphic imagery. Nevertheless, characters are actively engaged in their sexuality which is discussed, in explicit, colourful detail.

The play’s performance brings additional gay presences to its audience. The various stylistic influences that inform the play would likely create various expectations of gay material in a prospective audience. Gay themes would be anticipated by audiences familiar with cabaret and camp; those familiar with Brecht would not likely be surprised to see sexual material as part of a narrative that addresses inequality and revolution. The play’s critical reception underscores these expectations. This reception reflects both liberal and conservative attitudes towards alternative sexualities. While the critical reception generally warned of the play’s salacious material in ways that may have also simultaneously raised curiosity in a prospective audience, it was also vague in offering details of the play’s sexual contents.

The production’s presentations of gay sexuality, either embodied, discussed or referenced, would appear to be apt for a situation where financial risk is relatively low. As a project based company (with no buildings nor permanent staff to support) losses incurred from Beggars would be minimal if audiences chose not to see a play with its degree of gay sexuality. The play’s association with the PuSh Festival, while potentially offering a larger audience, may have created in them more conservative expectations of what was to be seen. Alexandrowicz’s complaint that Vancouver is not large enough “for challenging performance forms” may, in fact signal that the riskiness of his material has an esoteric audience of only a certain demographic or size, and that this kind of work may not attain more mainstream production given its risky contents and presentation.
Chapter Five: A Battle of Values on the Streets

Chris Grignard's play *The Orchard Drive* opened on July 19th 2005, and ran for four days at the Kelowna Community Theatre as the premiere full-length theatrical production in the theatre's new Black Box Space. The play originated as a project for Grignard’s Masters of Arts at the University of Guelph. Grignard submitted the play to Theatre BC’s 2002 National Playwriting Competition in which he was a finalist. The play's production run also included four additional dates of performance with the same cast and production team at the Walterdale Theatre in Edmonton, Alberta, that same month.

*The Orchard Drive* is "a piece of historiographical metadrama" concerning an incident in 1997 when Kelowna Mayor Walter Gray refused to make a proclamation of "Gay and Lesbian Pride Day" (Harkness 1). In Grignard's play, set shortly after the mayor's refusal, four male teenagers react to his inaction while rehearsing for a production of Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* which they intend to mount during the city's (unproclaimed) pride celebrations. The play’s production operates at the fringes of theatrical practice, incorporating a number of non-mainstream methods and a miniscule budget. However the play features discussions of the physical details of and stages gay sex, at times rooted in sado-masochist practice. The play further challenges social orthodoxies of teenage sexuality, particularly teen gay sexuality, by creating sexually active characters with agency.

**Historical Background**

In 1997 the Okanagan Rainbow Coalition asked Mayor Gray to proclaim "Lesbian and Gay Pride Day" in Kelowna. Gray’s dropping of the word "pride" from the proclamation led to him and the City of Kelowna being found, on March 21st, 2000, to have violated the
provision in section 8 (1) of the B.C. Human Rights Code, and being fined $10,000 (Leishman 64). The provision states "that no one must deny a public service to any class of persons because of their sexual orientation" (64). Gray stated in testimony at tribunal that "he did not share the moral outlook of this group and recalled that the citizens of Kelowna had reacted very negatively to the 'gay pride day' proclaimed by his predecessor in 1996" (65). "He did not approve of homosexual behaviour and did not want to appear to be supporting, approving or endorsing a homosexual lifestyle" (65). However, he believed his wording of the proclamation would be "politically acceptable" (64). Dr. Becki Ross, a professor of Women's Studies and Anthropology at UBC, testified at the tribunal that "by eliminating the inclusion of the word 'Pride' the Mayor resurrects the shadow of shame and humiliation that has kept homosexuals fearful, closeted and unacknowledged" (65).

Mayor Gray responded to the tribunal's ruling by refusing all further declarations, saying that he may be asked again to declare "pride" in future by the Coalition, or perhaps by "some race hatred organization" (67). In his book Against Judicial Activism: The Decline of Freedom and Democracy in Canada, Rory Leishman suggests that the action of the mayor gained him" . . . the support of the great majority of the citizens of Kelowna. Scarcely five months after [the] decision he was re-elected mayor with over 95% of the vote" (68). Neither the Coalition nor Gray's prosecutor acted upon their threat to bring him before the tribunal again.

Text

Grignard's text critiques the mayor’s action through an analogy to The Cherry Orchard in which Madame Ranyevskaya fails to recognize the changes in society and clings to anachronistic values. Given that Kelowna is a cherry-growing area of the
Okanagan Valley, Grignard’s invocation of Chekhov’s play works well. Grignard suggests that the mayor’s intolerance of homosexuality, evident in his refusal to include “pride” in his proclamation, fosters homophobia which eventually leads to some of the city’s gay young men leaving a city in which they do not feel that they are welcome.

Grignard's text begins with "Note on the Date's Importance" where the author offers the reader details of the mayor's proclamation and the resulting court tribunal. These notes include: "many living in the Okanagan Valley that deal with discrimination insist that their pride proclaims that homosexual orientation is indeed not shameful" (Grignard, Orchard 3). This note, which sets the tone for the following play as one that will contest Mayor Gray and his political stance, concludes by noting that at the time of the script's composition (and also its performance), Mayor Gray was still in office and still refusing to acknowledge gay pride day. The note situates Grignard's text as a response to an unhealed wound to the equality of gays and lesbians in the Okanagan Valley.

The script presents four male characters as they rehearse an adaptation of The Cherry Orchard. They are to perform the play the following day during the pride celebrations with the hope that the play's messages will comment on the current situation with the mayor and the pride proclamation. The Cherry Orchard is set in Czarist Russia around the turn of the last century and concerns the household of Madame Ranyevskaya, who fails to adapt to the changes in her world. Born into aristocracy, with an underclass of former serfs in her home, she seemingly cannot adjust to the demands of her current situation in which she must be fiscally responsible, and accept that now-emancipated serfs have more financial means than she does. She must sell her famous cherry orchard in order
to solve her family's fiscal problems. Seemingly, she doesn't understand her financial situation, and continues to behave as if she were financially flush by giving away gold coins and tipping excessively, while her family's security slips away. Grignard's character Bernard tries to convince Gordon that the end of Chekhov's play, where "the cherry orchard is sold and destroyed and everyone leaves" will be an apt allegory of the consequences of the mayor's understandings of his constituency as he has stated them (Grignard, Orchard 36). Bernard believes that the mayor alienates and drives young people away from their home by not responding to changes in society nor reconsidering the inherent homophobia of his statements. Bernard tries to convince Gordon of this idea; "Now, if that doesn’t drive home a PERSONAL message, Mister Always Wants to Leave Kelowna!" (36). Yet Gordon is unconvinced:

BERNARD: This play has A LOT TO SAY about our city, Gordon! I thought you, of all people, would appreciate its political appeal!

GORDON: WHAT POLITICAL APPEAL? The characters aren’t doing anything.

BERNARD: Yes they ARE!

GORDON: BORING!

BERNARD: Don’t you see the symbolism? The cherry orchard is really—

GORDON yawns theatrically.

Everyone leaves in the end. Gay people are leaving due to ignorance and—

GORDON: They won’t pick up on it. We can do better.
BERNARD: Don’t underestimate your audience. (37)

Grignard, by specifically spelling out what Bernard wants their audience to see (the connection between the mayor and Madame Ranyevskaya), allows for the audience to make the connection and to understand consequences of the mayor's homophobia. Gordon points out that using Chekhov's play is likely to be ineffectual in getting a message across, and that the youth's audience "won't pick up on it." But because Grignard is explicit, his audience sees that neither the mayor nor Madame Ranyevskaya can accept change. While the mayor's homophobia may be representative of the views of many in Kelowna, the human rights tribunal's finding against him indicates that his values do not have social currency.

Grignard's work makes additional connections between the two characters. At the end of a long section where Bernard plays the mayor, Gordon starts feeding him Madame Ranyevskaya's lines in an intertextual moment of the play, underscoring a similarity between the two characters (Grignard, Orchard 68). The text proceeds to connect Madame Ranyevskaya's orchard to Gray's constituency in terms of how both serve to define each character's identity. When these defining aspects of their worlds are threatened by change, the characters panic. The text offers Ranyevskaya's lines at this point, which operate to reveal the mayor's anxieties of a changing world as well: "After all, I was born here! My father and mother lived here! My grandfather! . . . I LOVE THIS HOUSE! WITHOUT THE CHERRY ORCHARD I CAN'T MAKE SENSE OF MY LIFE" (68).

The titular orchards of both plays figure represent lost, and perhaps only imagined, ideals. Chekhov's cherry orchard symbolises the entitlement and privileged lifestyle of czarist-era aristocrats while Grignard's references a bucolic, pastoral imagining of pure, rural living that Kelowna no longer maintains. (Situated between two mountain ranges, the
Okanagan valley is an expansive area with remarkably pleasant weather and fertile agriculture. The Okanagan's largest city, Kelowna, capitalises on its geography and is renowned as the "fruit basket for the province" or for the west [Canadian Encyclopedia, "Okanagan"; Igougo]. The city's websites boast that "orchards and vineyards thrive within a 10-minute drive of the downtown core" and fruit themes are common in representations of the area [Tourism]. The city and travel industry also make heavy use of imagery showing bucolic, rolling orchards and family vacation scenes in their advertising, selling a pastoral, family paradise in Canada; one rife with fruit and nature's bounty [Tourism; Igougo; Tripadvisor]. The appeal of the area has led to Kelowna seeing rapid growth over the last two decades. Consequently the city has become plagued by overdevelopment and a host of other urban problems including: new developments at risk of forest-fires, housing unaffordability and homelessness, alcohol-fueled youth riots, and gang wars, among other issues [Harcourt 1; Marten 2; CBC, “Kelowna’s”; Sinoski]. These problems can be considered to counter the Mayor’s projection of a rustic paradise.)

Grignard's text relies on its reader having knowledge of Chekhov's work in order to fully appreciate the connections he makes between the situation in his play and that in Chekhov’s., The Cherry Orchard is considered a canonical work which routinely is produced. It is safe to say that regular theatre-goers would probably be familiar with the work.

Grignard's text illustrates the consequences of the mayor's declarations (those that resurrect “the shadow of shame and humiliation”) through a metatheatrical moment. Immediately following the aforementioned scene, Gordon attempts to convince Bernard that the messages in their version of Chekhov's play are too subtle to protest the mayor's
actions. Gordon demands that they address the play's subtlety by improvising a new section to be played immediately before *The Cherry Orchard*’s performance. He begins this exchange by reading a letter he finds in the local paper that supports the mayor. The letter states: “I am appalled by these gay people’s homosexual agenda . . .”, that the celebration has an “evil mandate to celebrate and parade their sins” and that the mayor’s response will help to “keep our valley clean of their contamination” (Grignard, *Orchard* 59-60). In the subsequent scene Bernard, playing the mayor, reads an article from the same newspaper:

BERNARD. Kelowna city Mayor refuses to follow Mayor Stuart's lead of the previous year to proclaim, "Lesbian and Gay Pride Day." Gray's decision wanted to prevent that from happening again. Wishing to steer a middle of the road approach, Gray's actions continue to deeply offend the gay and lesbian community . . . After much contest, Gray said he would proclaim, ‘Lesbian and Gay Day,’ but not, ‘Lesbian and Gay Pride Day.’ Thus, saying the word PRIDE, he feels, would be seen as an ‘ENDORSEMENT’ of homosexuality by him and by the City of Kelowna. (62)

Gordon then confronts the mayor:

GORDON. Mayor Gray, do you know what it’s like to feel that your hometown does not accept you? Knowing that a banner downtown proclaiming your pride was BURNT and TORN down? . . . Seeing your childhood best friend stay closeted because he doesn’t have the strength to come out? What you feel is exactly something my parents feel. ‘You don’t need to be waving your flags around. You don’t hear us
proclaiming our pride, do you? You don't see us in a parade.’ You guys
don’t get it, do you?

Boucherie, your turn! (62)

Boucherie is unable to improvise an address to the "mayor", so Harvey steps in:

HARVEY: Mr. Mayor. Have you seen the movie, Full Metal Jacket? It’s
like this war time movie. And there’s this fat guy who’s in the army. In
the middle of the night, the platoon gets up and they wrap their bars of
soap in a towel. As the fat guy is sleeping, one of the guys gags his
mouth, while the others gang up on him and take turns hitting him. Just
BEATING the shit out of him. And all you can hear is the slapping
sound of the towel hitting his body and his MUFFLED SCREAMS.
Afterwards, they just leave him alone crying. Do you know what the fat
guy ends up doing? . . . A couple days later, he goes to the washroom in
the middle of the night. He sits on the can. He deep throats the muzzle of
his rifle and he BLOWS his brains out all over the white tiles behind
him. (63)

Harvey then creates a weapon out of a spartan apple and a "catch-sock" (a sock used in
masturbation):

HARVEY. Did you hear about that kid from Summerland who blew his
head off with his Dad’s hunting rifle just because he liked to wear
women’s clothes? Yeah (sarcastically) ‘Ha ha.’ Apparently he HATED
how he was and he was freaked right out that people would find out, and
that he’d be bullied. Do you know what it’s like to be bullied?
HARVEY puts the apple into the catch-sock. He then hits BOUCHERIE’s stomach with the weapon twice. . .

Huh? Answer me. . . Mr. Gray. Do you get satisfaction from seeing people suffer? Knowing that you have played a part in their suffocation?

HARVEY hits him again.

Answer me! . . For someone who stands as a pillar for our city, you

FAIL TO HOLD US ALL UP. (63-64)

This long scene unpacks the consequences of a public embrace of mayor’s values. Gordon’s reading of the letter to the editor makes plain how the mayor's open expression of homophobia is able to rally his constituents to also express their values. The letter however heightens the level of antipathy. Where the mayor disapproves of behaviour and won't endorse a lifestyle, the letter anticipates far greater actions, asking to "keep our valley clean of their contamination." The writer's choice of words evokes ideas of ethnic cleansing, which in turn suggest the historical, genocidal consequences that arose from similar public discourses. The letter-writer's phrase also underscores how the mayor has framed gays and lesbians as Other; it clearly delineates a divide between "our" and "their," expressing an ownership of the valley and disassociating those Other from that ownership.

Gordon addresses the mayor directly, pointing out the consequences of the mayor's discourse. His confrontation illuminates various ways through which the mayor's words operate and promote the alienation of youth from their hometown; by having their banners burned and torn down, by creating an atmosphere that exerts a pressure to remain closeted, and by straining familial relations. While Gordon exposes the undesirable consequences of Gray's understandings, Harvey makes graver accusations towards him. Using a narrative
from a popular film and then a local example, he tells how those in positions of dominance violently bully the marginalised for whom suicide can be their final means to escape the torment. Harvey not only accuses the mayor of enjoying the suffering that the mayor's pronouncements foment, but he also instantiates that suffering when he beats Boucherie. Grignard's script allows his characters to map out the potential consequences of the mayor's declaration, by showing the operation and violence of homophobia and systemic heteronormativity in their world. By exposing these consequences, youth alienation, violence, suicide, familial discord and failure of self-realisation (through remaining closeted), the text works to destabilise any value, civic virtue or "politically acceptable" meanings that might be considered to have arisen from the mayor's proclamation (Leishman 64).

Grignard's text also challenges mainstream social orthodoxies about teenage sexuality. Canadian political and social organisation reflects the notion of homosexuals as diseased in its history of regulating sexuality for adults and youth. As mentioned in Chapter Four, the age of consent for vaginal sex was lower than for anal sex at the time of the play. As discussed, these differing laws of consent police presumed gay sexual behaviour more restrictively than heterosexual behaviour (Department). The thinking behind such laws illuminates a number of connected presumptions concerning youth and sexuality. The first is that the sexuality of youth is malleable: developmentally immature youth may try homosexuality and – to borrow from a contagion model – become a homosexual by doing so (Sheldon 7; Angelides 73; Howe 135).

The second idea is that society looks upon children or youth who are gay as undesirable. This reasoning justifies unequal laws that may keep young people away from a
potential infection or contagion of homosexuality for as long as possible (preferably until adulthood, where infection may be not longer be possible as sexuality is then presumed “established”) (Howe 135).

The law implies youth have differing abilities to identify their sexuality, depending on their sexual orientation. This understanding is reinforced through unequal age of consent laws, which operate to enshrine into law ideological tenets that homosexuality is not naturally expressed by youth; but is the result of coercion by an adult or a dangerous mode of experimentation. These understandings’ expression in law suggests these heteronormative and homophobic ideas have been considered as accurate perceptions of teen sexuality.

Grignard's text challenges these notions by creating three teenaged youths, all within a year's age of each other, who self-identify as gay. The three all appear self-aware, and are politically engaged in their gay community from the position of being out, gay youth. There is no indication of coercion to identify as homosexual. Their sexuality appears natural, with the exception of the fourth character Bernard whom the others suspect is closeted. Boucherie, the youngest, is openly gay and is involved with gay social media; however, the text doesn't indicate if he is sexually experienced (Grignard, Orchard 38). Harvey and Gordon are sexually active and have had anal sex with each other, in alternating positions (26, 38, 45-49). Their reciprocity noteworthy in that the position of a participant in gay, anal sex is constructed by some theorists as enacting relations of power, with the penetrator be the dominant member of the pair (Halperin, “How To” 96). As mentioned in Chapter Four, common names for these positions reiterate these power constructions (top and bottom, active and passive). Gordon and Harvey, by switching positions at times, do not
allow a reading of a power dynamic or a coercion to be operating in their sexual interaction. Their trading back and forth of the appearance of power in their sex acts denies recruitment and infection constructions of gay youth sexuality (at least from a recruitment model) where one has a position of power and inducts another into homosexuality.

Harvey is also sexually active with adults, clearly choosing to enter these relationships of his own volition. He works for a tourist bus company where he narrates the sites of the city to visitors. Through his narrations he trolls for available sexual partners by dropping in gay codings: "It’s all about speaking in coded language, where only another gay guy could pick up on it" (Grignard, Orchard 15). Harvey then aggressively pursues potential partners who respond to him. He tracks down a man he meets during a tour, continually phoning him during rehearsal. Harvey not only relishes telling the others about his potential conquest, but wants them to eavesdrop. He is told there is a secluded phone he may use, to which he responds "I don't need any privacy" (23). He then calls the number five times over the course of the play until he finally makes contact (35; 48; 50; 56; 58).

Harvey also openly discusses sex throughout the play, revealing intimate details about his experience and conjecturing about others’ involvements. When he senses Boucherie's attraction to Gordon he comments about the pain Boucherie will endure when Gordon anally penetrates him, comparing it to the pain Boucherie will feel when Gordon leaves the city for good (45). He then begins to describe Gordon's genitalia in detail and offers advice as to how to be seduced and reach orgasm with Gordon (46). He finally ends this section by relating his own experiences of having anal sex and making coprophilic comments about them (47).
Harvey's intimate descriptions and forthright manner suggest that he is confident in his sexuality, unashamed and unlikely to be coerced. He appears to know and enjoy a variety of gay sexual practices, and to be assertive in his sexual choices. This agency makes it difficult for a reader to believe that he could be coerced into any sexual practice against his choosing. Grignard's presentation of Harvey acts to contest social orthodoxies and theatrical characterisations of disease whereby youth are coerced, converted or infected in homosexual practice instead of "naturally" becoming heterosexual.

Harvey's sexual descriptions might strike some as verging on being pornographic. Sexually explicit texts in Canada are regulated by legal constraints which are dependent on the explicitness of the text, the site of text’s exposition, and various other contextual circumstances. Explicit representations of gay sexuality have been considered by some in the gay community to mean differently than do equally explicit heterosexual representations, and thus ought to be considered by a different set of constraints. Gay legal and cultural workers, such as EGALE (Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere) and LEAF (Women's Legal Education and Action Fund) have argued that explicit imagery of gay sexuality serves a vital purpose in gay culture. In the 2000 obscenity trial of the Vancouver bookstore Little Sisters, the interveners LEAF and EGALE contend[ed] that homosexual erotica plays an important role in providing a positive self-image to gays and lesbians, who may feel isolated and rejected in the heterosexual mainstream. Erotica provides a positive celebration of what it means to be gay or lesbian . . . Erotica, they contend[ed], plays a different role in a gay and lesbian community than it does in a heterosexual community . . . Gays and lesbian are defined by their sexuality and are
therefore disproportionately more vulnerable to sexual censorship. (Little 1159)

Eric Clarke also writes of how sexual representations are positioned and censored by orientation in our culture: "the public sphere both draws upon and legitimates specific forms of intimacy and erotic experience – indeed is saturated by spectacles of intimacy – those that do not conform to a heteronormative standard are demonised and repudiated" (Clarke 5). Here Clarke’s "heteronormative standard” can be read as a hegemonic parameter of a dominant set of values. While heterosexual spectacles of intimacy are "saturated” in western culture, their ubiquity marks alternate representations (such as in Grignard’s text) by both their difference and by their relative rarity.

These ideas all inform Grignard's use of explicit gay sexual imagery. Using LEAF and EGALE’s rationale, his sexual imagery allows gay readers of the text to feel less isolated. They would do so through experiencing art that broadly reflects or relates to their own practices and which rarely appear in public venues, especially in theatre. In this manner, Grignard’s text allows for a gay gaze towards his material. Steven Drukman borrows from Laura Mulvey’s model in suggesting that some theatre allows a gay gaze for its audience by allowing them to identify with an “object of scopophilic pleasure while objectifying the intended subject of ego-identification” (Drukman 23). This gaze allows for gay audience members to have differing identifications with characters than would be evoked in scripts not aimed towards a homosexual constituency. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Alan Sinfield writes that this “address,” where “knowledge, beliefs and feelings are being appealed to and, more important[ly], taken for granted,” is important for some audience members to “feel themselves to be in the focus, as the constituency being
addressed, while others will feel marginal” (Sinfield, Out 343). The Orchard Drive appears to address a gay constituency in its audience through its frank expressions of gay living. Furthermore the explicit sexuality could likely have a homoerotic appeal to gay audience members not deterred by its sado-masochism.

Readers supportive of what Clark refers to as a "heteronormative standard" of erotic imagery would likely consider Grignard's text to transgress that standard (Clark 5). Grignard's explicit passages easily could be subject to censorship in other venues or media in Canada; one cannot imagine his script playing on prime time Canadian television. Yet in the context of a play about the censoring and silencing of gay pride, his explicit presentation of gay sex is important, a celebration of the pride which the Mayor of Kelowna tried to suppress. These passages illustrate two differing reactions from potential readers depending on their subjectivity: one where the play’s imagery may be welcomed as a rarely seen reflection of gays' identity, or another where it may be rejected as pushing boundaries of heteronormative tolerance.

In the culmination of the aforementioned scene, Grignard's text pushes this boundary further by referencing sadomasochistic practice in the play’s staged sexuality. When the youths vent their anger towards the mayor through improvisation and act out homophobic aggression to question how the mayor responds to it, Harvey takes the "catch-sock" with the apple in it, ties two other socks to it, and creates an improvised ball-gag to put on Boucherie (Grignard, Orchard 66). This action offers both an image of how the mayor silences gays through his proclamation, and also acts to overtly illustrate alternative, non-traditional sex practices. Harvey speaks of the gagged Boucherie to the mayor, accusing "that’s the freak you see us as" (67). The gag is put on too tight, Boucherie begins
to choke, and as he suffers Harvey becomes aroused and masturbates. The other characters panic as they cannot remove the gag, and the scene culminates with the gag finally being removed as Harvey reaches orgasm over Boucherie's body (70). As discussed in chapters one and two, John Clum refers to gay sexual action on stage, or “embodied homosexuality,” discussing the impact for audiences of seeing intimacy between men (Clum, Still 10). "The continuing shock value of open demonstrations of homosexual affection or desire shows not only the continuity of heterosexism but also the theatrical principle that bodies contain the greatest potential danger for a contemporary audience, and theater’s power stems from its danger" (Clum, Acting 1). The Orchard Drive not only uses live bodies to show gay sex, it represents these moments of sex in a context of sadomasochism. This context moves the "demonstration" even farther outside the "continuity of heterosexism," marking the sexuality as more deviant. Harvey's comment that the mayor imagines a homosexual as a "freak" indicates that Grignard's rendering of deviance goes beyond even his own gay characters’ boundaries.

Clum defines gay kissing as even more transgressive than sadomasochism. Prior to this scene, when the youths are still rehearsing the Chekhov text, Ranyevskaya has to embrace Trofimov, and kiss him on the forehead. Harvey, playing Ranyevskaya, instead "then grabs BERNARD and forcefully shoves his tongue down his throat. Only GORDON and BOUCHERIE laugh. The kiss should last for a good five seconds." (Grignard, Orchard 33). While Grignard's other sexual depictions and descriptions operate to transgress heteronormative values by their otherness and rarity, his use of a kiss brings a familiar reference that works to transgress heteronormative values in an opposite manner. The kiss in this scene doesn’t connote love, but rather is used to tempt Bernard into responding to its
homoerotic feeling (and to thus come out of the closet). Grignard’s descriptions of the act make its passion unmistakable. By reflecting on a kiss's familiarity, readers of the play that would distance its gay sexuality as alien are likely to find transference of the kiss's semiotic meanings between what is familiar to them and the youths in the play. If a kiss means passion, regardless of the sex of the kissers, then passion is seen as a shared experience between viewer and character, regardless of that character's alien-ness. In this way homosexual kisses are made not so alien, and this may disturb or threaten the foundations of heteronormative value systems; systems that function by keeping homosexual experience alien and marginalised.

**Conditions of Production**

The play's conditions of production framed the entire theatre experience by accentuating the script's challenges to heteronormative values, as evoked by the mayor and his supposed local cultural norms. Much of this challenge derives from the play being mounted outside a number of theatrical conventions. The play was produced on a notably small budget, which affected the production's level of professionalism, and allowed for the script's challenging and interventionist moments to be less distanced from the audience than they would have been with conventional practices.

**Script Development**

As mentioned in Chapter One, playwrights often develop their scripts through a process of workshops, readings, and meetings with dramaturges that are often arranged by interested theatres (often with arts councils' support). Through the process of honing a work until deemed both aesthetically and commercially ready, development can blunt, reshape or contain potentially provocative subject matter. Grignard did not have his play developed
within the context of a subsidized theatre company which allowed the script to written without consideration of its financial viability as a production. *The Orchard Drive* was written as a part of coursework, and notably in an academic environment where the marketability of a potential production was not the foremost concern of the process. The play’s development process included two readings and dramaturgy from well renowned Canadian playwright and professor Judith Thompson.

*The Orchard Drive*’s development in this way could have affected the play’s provocative and interventionist themes in an opposite manner from one directed towards product and saleability. From the very onset of the project Thompson stated her objectives were for Grignard to “break rules” and to “see blood on the page” (Grignard, *Driving* 93-4). These instructions can be interpreted to mean that Grignard might risk alienating potential audience with his explicit aesthetic choices for the sake of aesthetic or artistic value. Thompson’s instruction to Grignard to break the rules and to disregard “theoretical approaches” to playwriting is reflected in Grignard’s work and its staged scenes of explicit and deviant sexuality (97). Grignard writes that he found this “blood” when he “dug deeper . . . struck a pipe, which I would puncture like an artery and . . . would willingly let the flow spew out all its bloody memories onto me” (96).

Thompson’s own dramaturgy may very well have informed Grignard’s process. While Thompson is a Canadian playwright of international standing, her work is renowned for its sometimes grisly themes, often depicting scenes of humiliation, aberrant sexuality, violence towards women and torture. Grignard categorises her reputation as a dramaturge as involving “exorcism, blood, pain, inner experience and childhood terror” (93). As Grignard’s play developed, his frank depictions of sexuality actually became more explicit,
rather than less so, as occurred with the development of both *The Shooting Stage* and *Beggars Would Ride*. His (earlier) master’s thesis copy of the script shows the ball-gag scene did not include a simultaneous depiction of masturbation (80).

**Funding**

As discussed in the introduction, *The Orchard Drive* is considered a fringe production, produced by Grignard for less than $2,000. Grignard initially provided the funding himself in the form of a line of credit, but late in the production he was assisted by external funding from two sources. A local Kelowna theatre producer and former instructor of Grignard's donated $200 to the play, and on the night of the play's opening in Kelowna, Grignard was informed that the Arch and Bruce Brown foundation donated $1,000 towards the production. This covered close to half of *The Orchard Drive's* budget.

The foundation's website describes their function:

The Arch and Bruce Brown Foundation awards yearly grants to playwrights who submit full-length plays, screenplays, musicals or operas. All works submitted must present the gay and lesbian lifestyle in a positive manner and be based on, or inspired by, a historic person, culture, event, or work of art. . . . The Foundation also offers grants (usually of $1,000) to production companies to offset expenses in producing gay-positive theatrical works based on history. The Foundation, a not-for-profit corporation registered in New York State, was founded in 1994. . . . (Arch 1)

*The Orchard Drive* obviously met these criteria and was awarded funds due to its presentation of a "gay lifestyle . . . in a positive manner." This financial support of gay
representation and visibility on stage runs contrary to the mayor's ideals – where he could not be seen as "supporting . . . a homosexual lifestyle" (Lieshman 65). This kind of funding is unusual for Canadian theatrical production, as it not only rewards particular, politically challenging content, but that it arrives from another state. There are Canadian theatrical funds for productions like Grignard's available from private foundations, government arts councils, and personal donations. While some private sources of funding are oriented around the applicant-playwright's identity (ie. some are available for women's or Jewish or Asian playwriting), most are not proposed for works that present a particular "lifestyle . . . in a positive manner" (Arch 1). This difference between the applicant's identity and the play's content, as grounds for receiving grants, points to differing philosophies at work between granting bodies. Grants for identity-oriented playwriting usually are created to increase opportunities for artists demographically underrepresented in the arts. Homosexual men are certainly apparent in the arts, but the level of participation is somewhat difficult to determine, as gay men’s cultural production may not read as gay production. In my research I have not been able to locate any theatre grants or funding in Canada that is oriented around an artist’s gay identity. This fact in itself, when considered along with the availability for other identity oriented assistance, may be indicative of resistance to the production of gay theatre. The Brown Foundation makes no mention of their applicant's identity, but operates to very specifically ensure the nature of what is visible on stage by promoting gay visibility as a "positive" or good thing. Their choice to fund Grignard's play in a foreign country indicates that the foundation’s money is not limited to citizens of the U.S. but is available to people throughout the world who are addressing systemic issues about staged, gay visibility.
Grignard applied for both Canada Council and provincial arts council grants for The Orchard Drive's production, but was turned down. He was not told the reasons why his project was denied funding, and the play may have been rejected for any number of reasons – especially considering it was his first major work. As was discussed in Chapter Two, there are avenues where biases may affect the dispensing of grants for gay expressions on stage. Some academics, like Robert Wallace, see the Canada Council as functioning to construct and preserve a national identity (Wallace, Producing 125). The exact form of this national identity would thus reflect the personal understandings and biases of the particular council adjudicators at that time.

The presence of government granting bodies in Canada's playmaking culture sets other terms for how Grignard's and others works are developed. Grignard had a certain deal of freedom by not using government funds. If he had obtained grants, Grignard would have had to create a budget where all his crew and cast would be paid, if not scale, at least a cooperative agreement wage. Most government funding bodies expect producers to raise a certain amount of capital on their own to be supplemented by grants (granting bodies often provide about half of what a project requests). By utilising this normalised practice for new play development and production and obtaining a grant, Grignard's production would have faced a number of practices and financial hurdles that would have potentially contained the production and the ideological meanings therein, and may not have come to production at all.

The inability to secure government grants required Grignard to produce the play inexpensively. He was able to accomplish his production through a variety of methods alternative to conventional and professional industry practices. Those involved in the
production used their own cars for transportation and shared hotel rooms rented by Grignard for the production. (Professional productions often house out-of-town actors, but normal practice allows actors individual accommodations, not shared). The set for the play was minimal; only a papier-mâché cherry tree and a few props were used. Grignard's mother ran a box office by setting up a card-table at the theatre's entrance, and no system was in place to reserve tickets; audience members bought them on a first-come-first-serve basis. Grignard did purchase a liquor license and served local beer and wine from another table at the back of the theatre. This service was presumably offered to off-set the cost of the production.

**Theatre Workers**

Grignard economised by using entirely non-professional personnel, although all would have been somewhat familiar with industry conventions through their training. The four actors had either been accepted into the BFA acting program at the University of Alberta, or were in the BA program there (where they have the possibility of moving into the BFA program) (Program, *Orchard*). At this early point in their careers none was a member of Equity which allowed them to perform in the play on terms they had agreed to with Grignard. At the close of the production, Grignard was able to pay each actor a $100 honorarium. The crew, a stage manager, technical director and a production designer were all also in BFA Program at the University of Alberta in their respective disciplines (in-house technicians, members of CUPE, were also employed as a part of rental agreements for the Black Box space) (Simmons 1).
The actors' presence in the BFA Program suggests they have some familiarity with contemporary methods of training actors. They would have had at least one year of generalised training in the University's Theatre Department (University, “BFA”).

Professionalism and training are areas where ideological influences subtly may enter theatrical practice. Ric Knowles discusses how "traditional" or entrenched theatrical training in Canada and other English markets tends to favour practices in acting training derived from Stanislavski, or its American derivatives (Knowles, Reading 32-38). These practices, deeply rooted in psychological explorations of character, are normalised as the dominant approach in acting pedagogy and performance in Canada (Knowles, Reading 138). This is often at the expense of other, non-western or specialized methods (eg. Grotowski, Brecht). In a Stanislavskian approach the fundamentally normative outcome of characters' interaction is a reconciliation of their Stanislavskian objectives – where psychological change in the character is expected, along with a dose of catharsis for the audience. Moreover, these normalised practices in Canadian theatre create a lens through which audiences often view work (140). As such these practices are naturalised in audience expectation and not only may lead audience focus towards individual characters' psychological journeys but also may lead them away from a play's interventionist potential by denying in audiences what Knowles refers to as "potentially disruptive or socially critical impulses" (141). In this regard, Grignard’s hiring of actors, and their performance in a predominantly naturalistic production, may not have afforded audiences access to such “impulses” as other, less mainstream approaches. That said, the actors’ BFA program, while accentuating acting studies of “realism”, also mounts works considered “politically contentious and provocative,” and works by playwrights renowned for their rejection of
naturalist work, such as Vaclav Havel (University, “Degree”; University, “Missionary”; University, “Memorandum”). The program thus appears to offer students some training with theatre that differs from a naturalist style and has interventionist potential. However, if Grignard’s audience did tend to focus on individual narratives rather than the play’s interventionist contents, the take-home message would likely be similar. All four characters’ psychological journeys are affected and informed by the same heteronormative milieu that the central narrative confronts.

**Professionalism**

The status of the actors as amateurs, and as students presented advantages to the production in terms of the actors' abilities to perform the script. In terms of casting, the play requires actors to play teenage youth. Institutionalised training in Canada mostly consists of three or four year programs where actors enter any time after high school or after at least one year of post-secondary education (for example, programs at the University of Alberta and at York University). This schedule turns out graduate actors usually in the mid twenties. The casting of first year students in *The Orchard Drive* allows the characters to be much closer in age and appearance to the characters they are playing. In professional productions, it is quite common to see older actors playing young people. This is often the only way, in houses that hire Equity actors, that theatres can cast experienced actors for the roles as relatively few teenagers are members of the union. Grignard's play is centered on youth and as discussed, much of its resonance comes from its subject matter of youth sexuality. Using actors that are the same age as the characters adds to the play’s sense of authenticity which, in turn, underscores the play's themes of youth.
Theatre Space

Grignard rented the performance-space by describing his project and providing a security deposit. The technical director of The Black Box describes the theatre as "a roadhouse, and shows and programming is [sic] booked by client/users on a first-come first-served basis . . . anyone can rent the facility provided they are able to meet deposit and insurance requirements" (Simmons 1). There is no distinct vetting process through which potential performance material is reviewed although the theatre manager, Randy Zahara, uses his "discretion . . . to try to balance the best interest of the City of Kelowna with enhancing the performing arts in Kelowna . . ." (Zahara 1). With no actual vetting of the script, Grignard's choice to rent space and self-finance, rather than more mainstream methods of producing a play, created avenues whereby the play's meanings could be unaffected by the conventions of production in more established theatre companies. By financing the production himself, Grignard retained control of the presentation of his script.

Conditions of Reception

The conditions of reception of The Orchard Drive also added to the text's resonances and created other sites of meaning. The theatre presented a new set of semiotics to its audience that contested traditional, invested models of theatrical production. The theatre's ownership and location also challenged the values implicit in the mayor's declaration and his positing of homosexuality as counter the values of Kelowna. Furthermore the Kelowna in Grignard’s play is not solely a wholesome, family-oriented, fertile vacationland. This reinterpretation made visible the area’s gay community, but also illustrated contradictions and instabilities within the representation of Kelowna as a
heteronormative idyll. The public discourse created by advertising the play similarly operated to question the mayor’s wholesome projection. Grignard's text, in its production in Kelowna, worked on a variety of meta-theatrical levels that moved its meanings not only across the levels of narrative in the play, but also across the fourth wall itself, blurring the lines between what was onstage and what was situated immediately offstage.

Critical Response

The reception by the press of Grignard's play normalises theatrical practices by focusing on the acting, as well as referring to the play's challenge to various political values. Moreover, media coverage of both the Edmonton and Kelowna productions illustrates how the play’s geographical location evokes differing focuses in these two areas. Don Keith (writing about the Kelowna production) refers to how the "real personalities" of the "dynamic acting ensemble" moved him "to tears" through "spellbinding and brave performances". Darren Harkness (Edmonton) says the play "would be nothing without its actors" . . . "who play their characters perfectly" in a "solid, passionate performance". Only Ron Seymour (Kelowna) saw the characterisations through a slightly different lens. He felt the performance of characters fell “just short of being caricatures of gay people” but were "right on the mark" at relating the difficulties of being gay in the Okanagan. The reviewers' comments, referring to the "real" and "perfect" playing, suggest that the actors' abilities, and the direction they received raised an expectation in the audience (or at least in reviewers) that the characters were meant to be received as mimetic of real Kelowna youths.

All reviewers commented on the play's resistance to the mayor’s values and to systemic heteronormativity. However, Harkness's Edmonton review mostly focuses on the characterisations and acting, mentioning the political aspects of the story in only one line.
Paul Matwychnuk, in Edmonton, notes that “the main action . . . concerns four young gay actors . . . dealing with their sexuality” while referring less to Kelowna’s political situation, mentioning only the mayor’s refusal of all further civic proclamations. Kelowna critics focus much more on the play’s meanings in terms of their city. Keith writes about the characters coming to "terms with the meaning of their existence as young gay men in Kelowna" (italics mine) and their "rejection of community" coming from the "mayor's bullying". Seymour similarly says the play is "sure to ruffle the self-styled great and good" and that the play portrays the characters’ "struggles growing up gay in a place they consider hostile to their sexuality. Jeffrey Simpson’s cover article in Kelowna’s arts weekly, eVent, devotes the majority of his coverage to the play’s “controversial content,” and refers to local citizens’ homophobic reactions to a local production of Cabaret. While media from both presentations drew some to focus on acting and character, the politics of the play’s themes appeared to register as being an important part of the Kelowna (re)viewer's theatrical experience.

Theatre Space

The Orchard Drive, with its overt, often graphic representation of homosexual youth, was not the usual theatrical fare produced in Kelowna. Its presentation was the premiere production in The Black Box theatre. As a wing of the Kelowna Community Theatre, The Black Box space was an addition to the main building in the late seventies, as an additional rehearsal and storage space (Simmons). The mainspace of the Kelowna Community Theatre has a traditional theatre auditorium and stage with a proscenium arch. When it was decided to convert the rehearsal space to a performance space in the mid-2000s, a separate entrance was built and the theatre was equipped with a full complement of
lights and sound equipment. It bills itself as a “Multi-Purpose Room” measuring 50’ long by 30’ wide with a 22’ ceiling (Simmons).

As discussed in Chapter Three, the black box theatre design was intended to be devoid of the various meanings that arise from more formalised theatre designs. Yet, as Ric Knowles discusses, such designs still code various meanings of their own. The Black Box theatre's set-up, during Grignard's production, had no formalised stage area. Portable seats had been placed in rows on the floor, with two sets of risers lined with chairs at the back, to give some height for viewing. Seating was open, not assigned. In the front, the rows merely stopped, and the flat black floor allowed no demarcation between playing and viewing area. The Kelowna vicinity has three other theatre spaces, all of which feature traditional proscenium arch designs, with elevated performance areas. Grignard's production, as the first play in The Black Box, would have introduced Kelowna theatre-goers to a new configuration of space.

The theatre's separate entrance, at the back of the Kelowna Community Theatre complex, would have initially indicated to audiences that they were not going to be having a similar theatrical experience to those they may have enjoyed in the main theatre. Entering and meeting Grignard's mother at a card table, taking in cash in an unadorned foyer would have been in sharp contrast to the comforts associated with the foyers of most subsidized theatres. Such comforts and conveniences work to both frame such an event as being high culture, and also to reify ideas that the experience is a crafted product being purchased. The Orchard Drive's black box experience would likely not evoke or reinforce such associations. Admission was cash-only; the bar in at the back of the theatre allowed the audience to return to their seats with their drinks rather than sip them in the designated bar
of the lobby. The lack of set, other than one papier-mâché tree, and lack of strong
demarcation of playing space blurred the separation between the performance space and the
audience's own personal space. This blurring of space is usually impossible in traditional
theatre space because the raised stage and proscenium arch create definitive boundaries
between the two areas. Even in the Firehall Theatre (another black box) and the Waterfront
Theatre, where the audience in the front row is on the same level of the stage, the fixed, soft
seats create a linear line which demarcates a separation between audience and performance.
The Black Box’s unattached seats allow audience members to adjust and move their seats
about to a degree. The lack of a formal line of seats allows for a sense that the areas may
mix or overlap. This allowed for a sense that the performance space was undefined or may
shift. These elements of the performance space contribute to the audience's reception of the
drama and, as I argue later in this chapter, lead to a kind of blurring between the play's
script and the audience's place. The viewers may see not only the staged drama but also a
local social drama, both occurring around them.

Susan Bennett writes about theatre creating a horizon of expectation for the
audience that is informed by their past experiences and sources of received information,
including performance space architecture (Bennett, *Theatre* 98). As discussed in Chapter
Two buildings that create expectations of high culture, do "not, then, overcode the
performance” with values associated with that culture (Bennett, *Theatre* 129). Grignard's
production in The Black Box Space allowed an audience to be freed of several mainstream
theatrical conventions found in other Kelowna theatres which traditionally help to shape
meaning. The space replaces an expectation of high culture with a sense of experience of
being at, and perhaps amidst, an event.
Program

The play’s program similarly replaces such expectations. A folded legal-size paper photocopy, its front has a low resolution map of Kelowna, with a circle drawn around the streets each character is named after. Its format differs from the glossy, stapled, printed (and sometimes full-colour) programs of the other, better-funded productions in this study. The program then lists the Brown Foundation grant and a warning about the play’s sexual contents. A short paragraph explains the setting’s date, when Walter Gray’s refused to utter the word “pride.” After a list of characters Grignard writes how his play will give voice to the voiceless, and while these “may sound familiar to some” they will perhaps “be too close to home for others” (Program, Orchard). The inexpensiveness of the program signals the production’s lack of means. The program also positions the play as offering content that differs from what normally is played on Kelowna stages. The warning about the content, and the hint that events “may be too close to home” give notice to members of the audience that their sense of place may be challenged, while references to the Brown grant and the mayor clearly indicate the play will explore homosexuality.

Theatre Location and Immediate Geography

The theatre's location and ownership creates a set of interesting and seemingly contrasting meanings. The Kelowna Community Theatre was built in 1961 "with municipal dollars and is continued to be run by the City of Kelowna" (Simmons). This initially seems odd; Grignard, who critiqued the mayor of the city (and by extension, his representation of local sentiments concerning homosexuals), paid that same city to facilitate his critique by renting theatre space from them. As discussed, the city didn't have a specific, or ideological vetting process for what was performed in the space. The theatre's location, amidst the city's
core government, tourist, and cultural facilities creates meanings that seemingly reveal
further contradictions. The theatre is in downtown Kelowna, near municipal and
governmental facilities for citizenship and recreation: The Kelowna Heritage Museum, The
Okanagan Military Museum, the R.C. M. P. station, Kelowna Memorial Arena, Prospera
Place (a full size hockey arena), The Kelowna Art Gallery, The Okanagan Regional
Library, Waterfront, Stuart, and Kasugai Parks, Kelowna Law Courts, and City Hall.
Private arts and cultural facilities are also numerable including the Kelowna Actor's Studio,
The Rotary Centre for the Arts, and a number of art galleries. The area is also a tourist
centre, with a casino, yacht club and marina, numerous restaurants, pubs and a large Delta
Hotel resort on the lakefront. Shopping and parking facilities are plentiful in the area, which
is one block from the waterfront of Lake Okanagan. These facilities serve the interests of
the establishment, particularly government, to reinforce dominant ideals of both commerce
and citizenship through the municipality's concentration of tourist, heritage, and family-
friendly spaces. When The Orchard Drive's production, with its open critique of the
mayor’s homophobia, was presented in the midst of the city's heart, it challenged the values
represented by the mayor and those who supported him. This contestation suggests fissures
in the supposed consensus around the mayor’s decision to prevent the celebration using the
word “Pride”, allowing civic space in the civic landscape of Kelowna for gay youth.

Producers

Similar contradictory meanings were evoked by fact that the Kelowna Secondary
School's (KSS) drama department, named the Night Owl Theatre, co-produced the event.
Grignard had developed a strong relationship with amateur and educational theatre
community during his years in high school in Kelowna. Drawing on these connections, he was able to ask for assistance from his alma mater in handling some logistics of the production. The school is a regular high school, governed by a local board, which is comprised of trustees elected during municipal elections. The school is funded by taxpayers and its board is a branch of the provincial government. The Board of Education for Central Okanagan states that one of its roles is "to set education policies that reflect the aspirations of the community and that are consistent with overall provincial guidelines" (School). The KSS not only assisted in the production of *The Orchard Drive*, the school was listed as a co-producer. Its involvement created further contradictions, where one expression of government condemned gay pride while another, by co-producing the play, actively supported gay cultural work. This support indicated that the mayor did not necessarily represent all citizens, nor arms of government, when he refused to proclaim "Pride." Government in Canada is normally distributed between at least three tiers – national, provincial, and municipal – and these tiers sometimes are in conflict. It becomes apparent when one branch actively promotes gay inclusion while another actively condemns it (even though both branches are expressions of the same electoral area), that there is a lack of consensus and active disagreement over the values that each branch supports.

**Area Geography**

*The Orchard Drive*’s critique of its setting’s locale considers a larger scope than just the local municipality. As discussed earlier this chapter, the entire Okanagan Valley is represented publicly by the municipality as a pastoral, bountiful paradise. Grignard
undermines this presentation of Kelowna as a paradise. His script references local symbols of the city, but he subverts these in their presentation. After Harvey puts the apple in the masturbation sock, he discusses the apple's place in their local iconography.

**HARVEY:** The apple’s our valley trademark . . . They’re everywhere.

Orchards. Orchard Park Shopping Mall. The Apple Bowl Sports Track.

Your backyard is an apple orchard. The apple concession stand at Gyro Beach. My high school was K.L.O. POP Quiz: Do you know what those letters stand for – K.L.O.? . . . ‘Kelowna Land and ORCHARDS.’ On the other hand, we have a different pride that is hidden within a sock that was HIDDEN underneath his bed. What happens when you put the two together? (Grignard, *Orchard* 63).

This "different pride" relates to Boucherie's semen in the sock, an image of his gay sexuality. Harvey's question is central to the play's inquiry. What happens when images of a bucolic paradise (that the city projects) are combined with ideas of an oppressive, bullying and bigoted authority? What is the impact on the representation of Kelowna-as-paradise once the gay population is made visible?

Harvey further juxtaposes a number of other images relating to fruit and gay sexuality. He uses an apple in his monologue as a tour guide as a way to pick up a gay tourist (9). Cherries are introduced as a prop and are eaten throughout the play. Harvey talks about cherries and their effect on his digestion. His comments discuss how they promote diarrhoea and their potential as lubricant for anal sex (47). He also plays with the word "fruit" invoking its slang pejorative for gay men in several double entendres (9, 69).
Through these examples Grignard connects the main symbol of the Okanagan, fruit, with gay sexuality through masturbation, cruising, anal sex, and gay identity. While fruit also symbolises fecundity and bounty – which can be seen as symbols of heteronormative reproduction – Grignard uses fruit to announce gay presences, showing their place in the Okanagan.

Harvey’s trolling for gay men through his job as a tour guide underscores the play’s exposition of gay presences amidst the city’s imagined bucolic paradise. Harvey uses fruit metaphors to enable him to identify gay tourists, whose transience mark his gay liaisons. Harvey, in effect, queers the pastoral image the city projects. By revealing gay presences within the tourist body, Grignard suggests that Kelowna and the Okanagan’s major industry includes a gay constituency that is drawn to, and a part of the area’s pastoral projection.

The Orchard Drive destabilises other aspects of the Valley’s ideals. The attractive weather in the Valley also results in high incidences of forest fires and the resulting loss of property. In 1997, 2003, 2005 and 2009 the valley was threatened by fires during which many homes were lost. Grignard's play is set during a fire which encroaches on the city. The smoke and its choking effect is mentioned throughout the script and also makes a image of the youth's inability to be themselves because they can't breath freely (11, 12, 14, 20, 21, 43, 57). The script additionally questions the city's pastoral image by discussing the sprawl and over-development that is destroying much of the iconic orchard lands:

BOUCHERIE: There’s no orchards there.

BERNARD: Well that’s because you’ve only lived here for five years. At one time all you could see were orchards. . . . My mom used to take me
on these drives and tell me stories about where orchards used to be. And when she knew that an orchard was going to be cleared, she would take me there to see it for the last time. Then, in a month or so, she would take me on another drive to show me the empty lot. I remember orchards where buildings and stores now stand. You know where the Apple Bowl sports-track is, right by my house? Right beside it there used to be lots of cherry orchards. They’re gone now. My mom would tell me that ‘our street is one of the first streets in the city. Be proud. . . ’ (Grignard, Orchard 37)

The commercial expansion of Kelowna encroaches on the farmlands which are key to the appeal of the area. Development also contributes to fire risks and numerous other issues associated with sprawl (Harcourt 1). While the location of the play's performance, in the downtown, draws an audience's attention to the values at play in Kelowna, the play's depiction of both commercial and the pastoral images shows inconsistencies in those values.

**Poster**

The play's poster features a postcard-like photograph of Gyro Beach on Lake Okanagan. The poster shows the area's two main attractions, beautiful farmlands and sunny recreation. The font of the play's title, set off at an angle, recalls old-fashioned postcards, emphasising the tourism of the area. However certain graphic elements disrupt the idyllic images. The poster is washed over in a deep red hue suggesting smoke, fire, or some other disturbance which unsettles the scene. The warning about "Sexual Content. Mature Audiences Only" suggest the material may be challenging. The Kelowna Community
Theatre's manager, Randy Zahara, says that the theatre has never had a warning on any of its other events (Zahara). This information suggests that the play will offer content that differs from what has normally been seen on the stage of a municipal facility in Kelowna. While the poster's scene is recognisable as an Okanagan shore, gay viewers may also recognise Gyro Beach as a popular cruising place for gay sex (Cruisinggays). This particular aspect of the play’s media operates possibly as code for potential gay audience members. It also suggests that the play offers a gay viewpoint, or address.

The meanings derived from the location of The Orchard Drive's performance all rely on connections being made between elements of the text and details of the performance's social and geographic surroundings. Grignard’s play refers to local geography, nightclubs, parks, meeting places, monuments, beaches and, of course, the mayor (whose office is directly across the street from the theatre). Many of these sites are within a few blocks of the theatre space. The streets, after which the characters are named, are also close by, with Bernard Street only one block from the theatre. The play’s program and its map also draw attention to the connections between geography and text. Grignard’s play also makes references to local sounds and recent, local history. These serve to connect the performance to the theatre’s immediate surroundings. Gordon complains numerous times about the haunting noises that the corrugated bed of the Bennett Bridge makes. This bridge, a few blocks from the theatre, is a kilometre long, floating landmark that crosses Lake Okanagan. The play also was performed during and as a part of Pride celebrations, exactly eight years after the event it addressed. At this time Mayor Gray was still mayor.

Through using these references to make connections between what was played on stage and what was immediately outside and surrounding the theatre, I contend that
Grignard created multiple sites of performance and meaning in order to blur distinctions between his dramatic action and the socio-political action that took place in Kelowna during Pride. By blurring borders between the staged and the real, Grignard brings his audience into the social geography of the play which makes the play immediate, and probably challenging, for a local audience. The play involves three individual narratives (the four youths interacting in a rehearsal space, their playing of sections of *The Cherry Orchard*, and their improvised confrontation with the mayor) which allowed movement of themes and ideas between the narratives. In a similar way, the performance space allowed a blurring between the staged action and the history of Kelowna in relation to expressions of gay pride. The play directly addresses the mayor's homophobic proclamation and its effect on gay and lesbian citizens, an event that occurred eight years before the performance but was still being felt. The performance was a part of an ongoing Pride celebration which occurred without the sanction of the City of Kelowna. This blurring is caused by several physical relations: the theatre's lack of a demarcation between performance area and audience, the proximity between staged references of place and their real place immediately outside the theatre's walls, and the semiotics of the building wherein both the civic position on not declaring "Pride" and the presentation of local gay art challenging that position brought forth contesting ideas about citizenship.

**Audience**

*The Orchard Drive* constituted a potential audience through its text and conditions of production. The play’s text allowed members of the audience to consider their own history. The play’s exposition of a position contrary to the mayor’s likely attracted potential audience members who opposed the mayor’s position. The play’s gay address specifically
welcomed the community’s gay citizenry. Grignard’s own background, having grown up in the city, could have created not only a curiosity among Kelowna theatre-goers but also perhaps a sense of civic pride. The meagre conditions of the play’s production permitted an inexpensive ticket price of ten dollars which allowed those with modest means, including youth, to attend. These conditions also create a space of reception that was coded with meanings that appear more oriented around an event, rather than a product of high culture. This event, situated amidst its subject matter, I believe worked as a site of intervention to the mayor’s proclaimed understandings of constituency.

In her dissertation, Sara Lyn Banting suggests, "plays that want to spotlight collective local knowledge must overtly connect the immediate social relations and the imagined geographies produced inside the performance space to the cityscape outside. Otherwise the world outside the theatre may fade to a distal background once the performance begins to absorb the audience’s attention" (Banting 181). It is highly unlikely that any audience member familiar with Kelowna would be able to see Grignard's play, with its consistent references to places immediately outside the theatre's walls, and have that "world . . . fade to a distal background." If the play succeeds in connecting "the immediate social relations and the imagined geographies," then "audience-members may be brought to feel that they are part of a local community that is self-aware: connected to other members of that community not by incidental parallels in their relationships to the city but by a theatrical moment that spot-lights their communal local knowledge" (181). I believe that Drive creates a "communal local knowledge" where audience members feel as though they are a part of the challenge to those values promoted by the mayor, and this is the play's most potent site of intervention. If theatre-goers leave the play believing they are connected
to a social-political action, then Grignard and his play have succeeded in challenging and intervening in local social policy.

**Summary and Conclusion**

*The Orchard Drive* presents four gay youth of whom three have active agency in their sex lives and openly, visibly celebrate their gay identity. Their gay sexuality is discussed in plain language and in graphic detail. At the play’s climax characters actively engage in sexuality that is coloured by sado-masochism. The play’s sexual imagery may reduce a gay audience’s isolation (and perhaps offer them a sense of inclusion) by allowing a gay gaze – what Sinfield refers to as a “gay address” (Sinfield, *Out* 345). The play’s gay address is recognised by the Brown Foundation’s award for the play’s presentation of a “gay lifestyle . . . in a positive manner”. The play’s gay subjectivities and discussion of gay sexuality are far more overt and visible than those in *His Greatness*. Like *The Shooting Stage*, gay youth are presented, however three of Grignard’s characters are openly, comfortably and visibly gay; MacLennan’s characters are troubled by their sexuality and thus closeted. *The Orchard Drive*’s embodied homosexualities, or performances of gay sexuality, are also staged more openly and visibly than those in MacLennan’s and MacIvor’s plays. Like some characters in *Beggars Would Ride*, Grignard’s characters actively address their own oppression. However *The Orchard Drive* explicitly confronts homophobia as a social problem, whereas *Beggars*’s social commentary is based more broadly on class disparity and privilege. *The Orchard Drive* also presents gay sexuality overtly, whereas *Beggars*’s sexuality occurs in blackouts or though oral narratives.

*The Orchard Drive* challenges a number of circulating understandings about homosexuality. By doing so, the play’s text disrupts various notions including: power
dynamics associated with anal sex, the idea that youth sexuality is unformed, and understandings of contagion and recruitment that contribute to the disease motif of the four Ds. The play is notably the only play of the four studied not to recall, in either its text or its reception, the marginalising narratives of the four Ds. The play disrupts a construction of the locale in which gay (young) men are invisible and makes them visible.

Comprehensively, gay themes are more overt and pronounced in The Orchard Drive than in the other plays discussed in this thesis. This may be due, in part, to the conditions of production and reception created by the play’s position in terms of mainstream production. The Orchard Drive was produced in fringe conditions far from the mainstream of theatrical practice. Unable to attain Canadian grants for his work, the relatively small amount of funds Grignard used to produce the play dictated some of these conditions. The small amount invested also ensured that the play’s risks were minimal. These conditions influenced elements of production and reception, and how these shaped meaning to audiences. The play was developed as part of coursework where Grignard was encouraged to put “blood on the page” by his supervisor, Judith Thompson. Rather than dilute the representation of homosexuality, as seems to have occurred through the workshop process in which The Shooting Stage and Beggars Would Ride were developed, Grignard was encouraged to explore sexually explicit material, and break with the “continuity of heterosexism” without concerns of creating sellable product. Grignard’s meagre budget also brought a minimal staging to the play. This made the play portable, and also led Grignard to mount the play in the cheapest available space, a black box theatre. The conditions of production, in a small venue where the distinction between the acting space and audience was not rigid, created an intimacy between performer and audience. Funding concerns also
led Grignard to hire students, as opposed to professionals. This choice added authenticity to the performance allowing the play, at least in its production in Kelowna, to resonate powerfully in terms of presenting gay young men living within a community in which the mayor was an advocate of homophobia.
Chapter Six: Conclusions, Implications and New Directions

This dissertation began by asking questions about how homosexuality is presented in our contemporary theatre. Historical antipathies have marginalised the theatrical presentations of gay men on stage in the past, and over the last century a change has occurred in the social location of gay men in Canada (from being marginalised to being included). In this thesis I consider the kinds of representations we find on our stages now, in this century. I explore whether these representations have evolved in step with the changes in gay men’s social location, or whether some theatrical representations of gay men remain marginalised in various ways. Given antipathies towards homosexuality and homophobia have the potential to affect theatrical production most where financial risk is highest, I propose that where there are significant commercial interests in theatrical production (usually in mainstream theatre), gay representations are more likely to be marginalised. Furthermore, given that gay sex itself, and its representation on stage (through embodied homosexualities or discourses and narratives of gay sex) have been theorised as a locus of antipathies to gayness, I propose that the sexual aspects of gay representations vary in their visibility and overtness depending on the production’s proximity to the mainstream.

The analysis of these four plays shows general trends, not only in the plays’ construction but also in the material conditions of their productions, that indicate the gay representations become more overt, visible and sexually explicit the further from the mainstream they are presented, indicating a correlation between the representation and its location. I identify various factors – including the development of the script, the producing theatre, venue, and promotion of the production, that shape gay representation. This analysis reveals how theatrical practices originating in the last century, practices that may
have had the effect of marginalising representations of gays, are still in place. These practices appear more prevalent the nearer their production is to the mainstream.

In this chapter I will briefly summarise how these productions’ gay presences appear to differ across the spectrum of production conditions. I will then look to this study’s design, and will then briefly consider how my own experiences as a playwright inform this study. Finally I will look to the larger consequences of what this study may mean in terms of Canadian theatre.

**Gay Sex and Gay Characterisations in Texts**

The texts of these plays vary in terms of how the plays present their characters’ sexuality and the visibility of that sexuality. *His Greatness* is coy in its presentation of gay themes and sexuality. Its two narratives and its coding of gay sex allow audience members to be distanced from its gay themes. Embodied homosexualities are not seen and when approached, the audience’s expectation is redirected. *The Shooting Stage* presents male-male sexuality more overtly. Like *His Greatness*, *Shooting* at times has scenes where homoerotic situations are developed and then thwarted, but embodied sexualities are seen in a performance of fellatio. In *Beggars*, gay desire and sexuality are explicitly discussed, yet the discussion is distanced from the audience by the script’s colourful and campy use of language. Gay sex takes place in blackouts and thus is not staged, creating less embodied sexualities than has *The Shooting Stage*. Lastly Grignard’s *The Orchard Drive* creates characters that are openly and visibly gay, and actively address their own oppression. Three of them discuss their sex lives, at times in plain language and in graphic detail. Embodied homosexualities are openly staged in the play. In these four plays, a trend is clearly seen
that shows the sexual aspects of characters being more overt and visible as production is at a distance from the mainstream.

Some of the plays tend to rely on characterisations that historically reflect the marginalisation of gay men, and these, too, appear in correlation to the play’s proximity to the mainstream. While characters in *His Greatness* reference the dangerous, diseased and demented aspects of the four Ds, references to substance abuse, mental illness and trade in prostitution are widely seen throughout Williams’s own memoirs and letters, and also in biographies of him. Their presence in the play could be considered an attempt to make Playwright a historically accurate rendering of Williams. *The Shooting Stage* replays both the four Ds and the Wildean model and, as discussed, works to deconstruct and destabilise aspects of them. *Beggars Would Ride*’s depiction of aspects of the Wildean model and the four Ds appear as part of larger aspects of the play’s exaggerated class narrative, and may be regarded as an exaggeration of a dominant hegemony’s control over gay expression and social position. Of the four works, only *The Orchard Drive* appears not to rely on these historical constructions of homosexuality. These four plays show that the characterisations that have historically been used to reflect the marginalisation of gay men on stage are still in circulation today; moreover these characterisations become more prevalent as one approaches the mainstream.

**Conditions of Production and Reception**

Various conditions of theatrical production and reception also appear to affect the plays’ presentations of homosexuality. Some of these conditions are exposed as places where the visibility of gay sexuality in productions may be actively altered over the course of the play’s journey to the stage. Other conditions of production and reception act as sites
where the visibility of gay presences may be changed, but this change is due to long held or traditional practices. In both regards, gay themes may be either brought to audience’s attention, or theatrically distanced and made less visible, depending on their proximity to the mainstream.

Histories of the development of each play and media campaigns of promotion are areas where the representation of homosexuality are contained and managed. Over the course of development MacLennan admits gay material was “stepped away from” in The Shooting Stage (MacLennan “Drafts”). In development Alexandrowicz removed his characters’ embodied sexualities from his script. In both these plays’ developmental processes, gay sexuality becomes less visible. In contrast, Grignard actually increases the amount of embodied sexualities in The Orchard Drive over the course of development. The media generated for each production similarly affected the visibility of each play’s gay themes. His Greatness’s media material focussed exclusively on the play’s inspiring figure, Tennessee Williams, and gave no overt indications of the play’s gay contents. Contrastingly, The Shooting Stage’s media offers many indications of the play’s sexual and sex-related themes. Beggars Would Ride own low-cost media acknowledges and at times celebrates the play’s gay content, whereas its more expensive media from the PuSh Festival contained only the phrase “sexual overtones” to offer a hint at any of the play’s gay themes. Lastly, The Orchard Drive’s simple photocopied pages for both its program and poster explicitly warns of the play’s sexual contents and offer both overt and subtle indications of homosexuality.

Other aspects of production and reception appeared to influence the ways in which the plays’ gay themes were realised in performance, but these generally appeared to do so
through their nature as traditional theatre practices or forms. I will discuss these as
generalised sites. The physical conditions of performance space and that space’s
surroundings brought numerous contexts to each production. *His Greatness*’s production on
Granville Island’s downtown location, the theatre’s ambience of affluent comfort, the
company’s history, the style of the play which the Arts Club produces and its production
values all promoted an idea of theatre product being received, while ultimately distancing
audiences from any of the play’s social critique. *The Shooting Stage*’s production on the
other hand, through its surroundings, company history, and set created expectations that the
show may challenge audiences and, as such, may have brought its gay themes more directly
to an audience’s attention. The theatre’s well appointed lobby and fixed soft seats however
also offer some impressions of receiving product, which might simultaneously insulate an
audience, to some degree, from the play’s gay themes. *Beggars Would Ride*’s set, theatrical
style, and company history creates expectations that its production will push boundaries and
challenge the status quo. However its performance space, surroundings and place in an
upscale festival appears to undercut the potential for the piece to challenge. Lastly, *The
Orchard Drive*’s production brings with it very little in terms of traditional expectations. In
this regard, the production creates contexts for the play’s gay themes to be not only the
central focus, but also for those themes to be regarded in an understanding that moves
beyond the stage and to the surrounding area of the city.

**Questions: Are Trends Static or Shifting?**

These four plays show trends in how gay themes and characters appear across the
spectrum of production. However, this study presents a number of issues in the scope of its
design that may well need to be addressed or considered for further investigation. While
trying to read a moment in a contemporary era, I attempted to find plays from as short a period of time as possible. However, the trends that are identified in this study may well be part of an ongoing change. As discussed in Chapter One, the ways in which gays are represented in theatre have undergone great change; one must consider whether trends identified in this thesis are part of an ongoing process. Whereas one might have presumed that a degree of gay equality, as enacted in law, might be reflected on our stages, this study suggests our theatre practices have evolved asymmetrically to our legislation and social developments. Given that this study found that some theatrical representations of gay men reflect not only outdated understandings, but could also be seen as disparaging, one might consider that Canadian theatre has room to continue to evolve if it is to reflect modern understandings of gay men. Consequently, a larger study continuing over a longer period would be useful as a follow up to this work.

If theatrical gay representations are still evolving, will they in future show gay men with the same degree of active sexuality as heterosexual men are now shown? That is to say, is the variety of ways that gay men are seen across the spectrum of performance, where they can appear as evacuated of active sexuality near the mainstream, merely a symptom of an evolving culture, one in which theatre may eventually come into line with other institutions that have affirmed equality? Given certain audience members’ antipathies towards embodied homosexualities, one imagines that attaining parity with the myriad, but problematic, ways through which heterosexual sex is staged may be the last site through which gay men’s representation becomes equal. Mainstream theatrical representations of gay sex have occasionally occurred in Canada, but are usually distanced, in various ways, from their audience. For example, in one of Canada’s most successful and mainstream gay
plays, *Poor Superman* (by Brad Fraser) gay sex is distanced from the audience through a kind of Brechtian use of captions and comments, which underscores its staginess, reminding the audience of the theatrical artifice (Fraser 48, 63, 134-5). Fraser, perhaps in the spirit of fair play, uses the same technique to problematise a staging of heterosexual sex in similar scenes.

**Regional Relevance**

Questions can certainly be raised as to whether trends seen in this study are found in other plays from this area, or in plays from elsewhere in Canada. As mentioned in Chapter One, Canada’s theatrical culture can be perceived as a kind of regional system that operates to serve geographically distant populations. Historically, between and within each region, there has been asymmetrical progress in terms of embracing gay equality. Quebec protected sexual orientation in its human rights code in the seventies, whereas Alberta was ordered to do so by the Supreme Court only in nineties (“Canadian Lesbian”, 1977; CBC, “Same”). Certain scholars have written about regional reactions to gay theatre in specific areas. Susan Bennett notably wrote about the 1995 Calgary production of *Angels in America*, where MLAs demanded drastic changes to government arts grants due to the supposed offending nature of the play. The frenzy of conservative reaction to the play prompted her to write that the city “seems the logical site on which to stage an interrogation of [the] question of tolerance and homosexual identity” and that “Calgary alone . . . seems to stand as evidence within Canada of an intolerance for homosexuality, or even its on-stage representation” (Bennett, *Only*). One might think that such a reaction to theatre with gay themes might create a climate where gay representations were necessarily staged with a degree of caution. Although this climate did not, in fact, thwart the production of *Angels in America*. 
Simultaneously one might posit Quebec, with its generally more liberal politics, is a place which may more readily embrace staged gay representations.

When looking at this study’s geographical details it appears that regional politics may not have that great an effect on how gays are staged. In addition to the mayor’s comments about the opinions of his constituents, the Okanagan is considered to be a conservative heartland, having sent a conservative MP to parliament since 1972 and once being the home riding for the Alliance Party Leader Stockwell Day. Simultaneously downtown Vancouver, a short water-taxi ride from the Arts Club and Waterfront Theatres, proudly contains the city’s gay village, and has been a Liberal riding for seven elections. Yet Grignard’s play, with its embodied homosexualities, was presented at the centre of the Kelowna’s government district without any apparent protest. Contrastingly, His Greatness’s producers, while operating in an area of local liberal politics, chose not to overtly signal that that play had gay content in any of its advertisements. These facts seem to suggest that in Canada the mainstream-fringe continuum, as a site of performance and production standards, is more influential in terms of affecting gay representation than any localised reading of an area’s or population’s politics. However a larger scale, cross-country look at gay plays might be able to more accurately ascertain whether regional differences determine the ways in which gays are presented on our stages.

**Playmaking Practices**

Considering that certain styles and practices of playmaking may affect the staging of gays (as the Brecht and cabaret style did in *Beggars Would Ride*) one might also consider that there are regional differences in theatre practice across Canada which might have an affect on gay representations and their reception. Some of these differences appear to be
merely casual traditions, while others are products of professional practices (such a local union rules). Theatre in Quebec traditionally has a much longer rehearsal period than has theatre elsewhere in Canada. Additionally the province’s granting resources heavily promote Quebec’s French-language arts, including performance, as a bolster to the province’s identity. Furthermore Quebec’s French-language theatre has certain renown for its experimental ethos, as seen in works by Carbone 14, Théâtre qui monstre énormément and others. Calgary is also known as a place where theatre breaks boundaries in terms of form and style. The city’s theatre industry could also be considered a site for experimental work. While the city has a number of traditional theatre companies like Theatre Calgary, other institutions like Alberta Theatre Projects, its Enbridge Playrites Festival, and the High-Performance Rodeo have a reputation for avant garde works. How the varying practices and traditions of these two cities may, if at all, affect the ways in which gay representations are created and received on their stages is certainly a question that bears further investigation. Do avant garde playmaking practices affect the content and meaning of plays in terms of their gay representations? As an ideal expansion on the ideas presented in this investigation, it would be of interest to track staged gay representations on a national level, over time, taking into account the various practices and stylistic choices used across the span of our playmaking. Such a study might determine whether these variables have any affect on how gays are represented on our stages.

**Sample Size**

The relatively small sample size of this investigation bears further scrutiny. My survey’s small size cannot be representative of larger trends in our theatre with any degree of statistical surety. Furthermore, while I have explained my methodology in terms of how I
chose the four plays for this study, and choices often were determined by the extent of the archive for each play, there is a place for bias to enter my investigation. That is, there is a chance that I have inadvertently chosen plays to fit what I intended my thesis to prove. However, if I had the ability to choose plays with this intention my thesis would have likely worked more elegantly, and more conclusively – especially if I had been able to find works that had all played in a smaller regional area, and yet were produced in distinctly different sites. Due to the circumstances of the study, the scarcity of material to work with, more than any other factor determined my criteria in selecting plays. The bias of a researcher is also an issue when considering that I have collegial relationships with three out of the four playwrights in the study. However, this familiarity is more a signal of the small size of the Canadian theatre industry in which I am a produced playwright. Given the even smaller pool of gay playwrights writing gay material in Canada familiarity with playwrights is inevitable: most of us know, or know of, each other.

While this study only looked to four plays, it is salient to note I have great deal of experience in both watching and reading Canadian plays over the last fifteen years. Furthermore, my initial samplings of gay plays from BC (and also, earlier in my studies, from all of Canada) allowed me to further read a large number of gay plays. My interests in writing this thesis derives from this exposure to a much larger collection of gay plays than just the scripts studied for this project. From both reading and seeing a large number of plays, I felt that Canadian theatre was failing to address, include, or make fully visible persons like me on stage. In more mainstream theatre it was almost impossible to find any lead gay characters that didn’t in some ways recall the Wildean model. Older, canonical works often replayed the four Ds making me both feel an outsider and abject, even while
experiencing a slight thrill in seeing a gay character in the first place. When I could occasionally find a gay character in a mainstream production I was inevitably disappointed if he evoked the Wildean model because I would not identify with such a character. In worse cases I felt shame at seeing persons like myself being marginalised (often by portrayals one or more of the four Ds). To say I was ashamed does not preclude that I was empathising with gay characters and sharing their emotions. Rather I felt shame and anger to be gay when the meanings derived from what I was watching was making clear that an aspect of my personhood was demonised by the play’s narrative.

It is these feelings that made me question how gay men are currently represented in our theatre. Given that this study does not claim to conclusively determine that a play’s proximity to mainstream production dictates the ways in which the play’s gay representations are manifest, but rather as (a preliminary examination) only points to trends that beg further investigation and observation, I don’t believe the small sample size of plays used in this study is a major concern. While this study has some limitations, it illuminates trends that may be useful to those who watch gay theatre. It may create an awareness that allows play-goers to scrutinise how gay men appear on our stages, and how theatrical practices can affect the ways in which gay men appear there. Ultimately it may serve as a barometer as to the how gay men’s social location is reflected in our cultural institutions.

**The Place of Contemporary Gay Theatre**

This thesis has shown a trend where Canadian theatre close to the mainstream tends to present gay characters in ways that may seem incomplete (or lacking in a visible and engaged sexuality), or are recalling of characterisations that have historically marginalised them. Given this trend, several questions arise. What is the importance of seeing gay men
on our stages? How might seeing them affect audiences and their perceptions of gay
persons? Are there reasons why characters in gay plays should appear in particular ways? If
so, is it possible, through understanding the ways in which staged gay representations mean,
to affect the ways audiences perceive gay men?

As mentioned in Chapter One, gay men’s representations in theatre can be
considered an important reference to, and reflection of, the progression towards gay
inclusion in contemporary life. Alan Sinfield claims “stage representations of lesbians and
gay men are influential” and that theatre has “helped to establish, consolidate and challenge
notions of lesbians and gay men that were held both by them and society at large” (Out 1,
4). Audiences viewing gay representations may increase their awareness and
understandings of gay life, and may shift or reaffirm their views concerning homosexuality.
Theatre thus has some potential to affect public perceptions of gay men. Are there ways
then that patterns seen in this study might reaffirm particular views about homosexuality?

Creating gay characters for the stage can also offer community and a gay space to
gay audiences. Through staging gay plays, theatres create gay spaces. These can be
considered places where gay community gathers or is constituted. Unlike television and
film, where programming of material with gay themes is usually decided at a centralised
headquarters, gay programming at theatres speaks to the theatre’s own imagining of itself in
terms of its relation to society and local community. Entering a theatre where gay material
has been programmed allows, depending on the theatre’s acknowledgement of that gay
material, a potential audience member to realise the experience as an instance of gay
community. Such a realisation can reduce or negate feelings of isolation and difference that
gay persons may endure in places where gay community is made invisible. Dennis Altman
claims that in gay cultures, “...there is a need to express a sense of community with other homosexuals and a view of the world based on the particular experience of being a homosexual: as that experience is altered by changing self-perception, so too gay culture itself changes” (*Homosexualisation* 152).

Staged gay portrayals can also offer gay audiences a gaze that is specifically intended for them, as gay citizens. A gay viewpoint may give them the understanding of their agency in their own identity, as they are able to see their own stories staged and not narratives created by the centre. Don Shewey refers to such theatre as a medium “created by gays on a journey of self definition” (xii). This “self definition” brings to those then a measure of control over how they are viewed by others. As gays negotiate a climate where homophobia is still present, gay portrayals can offer to them understandings, community, history and reflection. For a gay member of an audience, seeing gay experience presented unapologetically may ease his finding of a secure place in a Canada that is not always embracing of difference.

As gay sexual behaviour is an inherent, and perhaps defining characteristic of many gay men’s identities, the staged expression of their sex lives may be important in terms of whether gay characters are considered fully-drawn when seen on our contemporary stages. In his paper “Making a Gay Masculinity” Fred Fejes charts the history of gay identity in terms of masculinity. While he acknowledges the contemporary agency gay men have found as they “have emerged in the modern democratic political arena as active political actors demanding equal legal standing with heterosexuals”, he queries the nature of their depiction in media amidst the “heterosexual regime of society” (114). He writes that
... today a gay male can turn to the gay media for information and role models. The advertising saturated gay media would instruct the young male that to be a gay male in today's world one would be young, white, Caucasian, preferably with a well muscled, smooth body, handsome face, good education, professional job, and a high income. Indeed, there is very little difference between ads the mainstream advertisers aimed at heterosexual males and those aimed at gay males. (114)

Sarah Schulman believes that this kind of practice allows for the both the creation of a gay market for goods, but also to “sell . . . a palatable image of homosexuality to heterosexual consumers” (146). In response to, and perhaps fear of, a potential slippage between heterosexual and homosexual imagery, Fejes finds that “the heterosexual system . . . has developed new ways of regulating same-sex desire and practices” in popular media (114). He outlines how social forces of capitalism and heteronormativity tend to obliterate references to sexual desires in contemporary images of gay men.

... Today representations of gay males in the media often separate same sex desire from the males who practice it, representing the latter in a positive, masculine, and upbeat manner while making the former invisible. Mainstream media gay masculinity is a curiously de-sexed, de-eroticized phenomenon. A number of common strategies are employed . . . to show gay males as non-sexual . . . In many ways, this construction of a gay media masculinity reflects the fact that the growing visibility of lesbians and gay males is occurring during a very conservative period . . . and thus presents a representation of gay males that in no way challenges the heteronormativity
of mainstream society. These strategies construct very acceptable images of a gay masculinity which, because of their nonsexual character, do not threaten traditional notions of masculinity. In a sense, they are a variation of the strategy of the closet. In the past, a gay male acted masculine as a way hiding the fact he was gay. Today, a gay male can be both masculine and openly gay, but cannot in any way suggest that being gay has anything to do with erotic desires and practices. (Fejes 115-6)

Conor Habib links a phobia of gay male pornography to a similar denial of gay male sex and sexual desire in contemporary culture. He writes

To deny the importance of images of gay sex while pretending to affirm gay rights . . . is a luxury, and it's a dangerous one. It's the equivalent of cheering on a powerless gay neighbor in a 1990s sitcom, or to say, ‘I don't care what anyone does in the privacy of his own home, but don't bring it out into public.’ In other words, it's not an effort to understand gay men as whole human beings but to merely establish sexless caricatures of them to feel comfortable about . . . To be an ally to gay men, and by extension the LGBT movement, doesn't only mean being comfortable with gay men's sexual orientation, it also means being comfortable with their orientation to sex (Habib 1).

Given Sinfield’s understanding that “stage representations of lesbians and gay men are influential” to them and society at large, and that there is a pattern of removing or making invisible the sexual aspects in portrayals of gay men in various cultural images (showing them to be “invisible . . . de-sexed, [and] de-eroticized” and not “whole human
beings”), questions arise: how might the trends seen in this investigation affect audiences (Sinfield, *Out* 1-4; Fejes 115-6; Habib 1)? That is, what consequences might come out of stagings in mainstream theatre where gay men are de-eroticised and not seen as “whole human beings”?

Similar questions come forth when considering how marginalising representations of gay men found in this study may affect audiences. Stonewall Cymru, a gay advocacy group in Wales, found that a majority of gays, bisexuals, and lesbians are offended by portrayals of gay people in media. Furthermore half of them were “anxious about homophobic victimisation due to [these] media portrayals” (Gay People). Regarding gay youth, Espelage and Swearer have written about how “stereotypes towards individuals who are not exclusively heterosexual” are indicators in homophobic aggression and bullying (155). Given the understanding that media portrayals of gays are a factor in homophobic aggression and bullying, how may marginalising portrayals of the four Ds affect an audience?

A number of scholars have tracked the relationships that exist between media portrayals of gays and the wellness of gay persons, including gay youth. Ochman demonstrated that positive portrayals of media characters who share similarities with an individual can produce changes in the gay persons’ self-perception (711). In their work, Gomillion and Giuliano classify various grades as to how gays are represented in media. They consider three kinds of portrayals: positive representations; representations lacking in rich or positive attributes (which they label as “partially invisible” and in their view include “archetypes” of the four Ds and the Wildean model); and an absence of representation (which they label as “absolute invisibility”). They write that these representations in
performance media all “exert an important influence on GLB individual’s identities” (339-40). They note further that “most GLB individuals . . . may have experienced the negative affects of both kinds of invisibility” in media (340). “Negative portrayals of GLB individuals in the media” have “adverse consequences” including isolation and exclusion, (347). One can “feel . . . limited in the expression of his gay identity as a result of stereotypical portrayals of gay men in the media” (347). Conversely, they add that “GLB media figures . . . provid[e] examples of what GLB people look and act like”, and “the presence of positive GLB role models in the media” can “normalise . . . identity” (344-346).

Given the findings of Gomillion and Giuliano’s study, can we consider the consequences of gay constituents of audiences receiving negative characterisations of gay persons on stage? For adults who are familiar with these marginalising representations, these narratives may seem limiting, excluding, or insulting. For youth, looking to find representations of themselves in a culture where gay expressions still may be difficult to locate, these representations may be distressing or harmful. These studies seem to indicate that gay men, and in particular gay youth, may benefit from gaining access to positive representations of gay persons in media.

Outside of the genre of theatre for young audiences (or TYA), theatre is not usually aimed at a youth market to the same degree as is film or television. The demographics of the Arts Club’s audience reveal that mainstream theatre tends to play to older, wealthy audiences. However, two of the plays in this study specifically focus on gay youth. In plays like these, positive representations of gay persons may help establish healthy self images for gay youth. Various policy makers, concerned with high rates of gay youth suicide, consider access to information and discussion about sexuality essential to gay youths’
mental health (Bontempo 364; Gibson 110). This high suicide rate has been strongly associated with anti-gay bullying (Gibson 110). To address this problem, many school boards have began to implement anti-bullying and anti-homophobia programs, and numerous high-school students have created school clubs known as Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) in order to disseminate information and create dialogue about the issue. These measures have met with resistance from parent’s groups, politicians, and the church groups (Houston, “Bullied”; Houston, “Ontario”; Houston, “Rainbows”; Galashan; Wingrove). Various actions by these groups have had the effect of removing gay youths’ access to information and silencing queries into the subject. This occlusion of references to homosexuality from students’ purview has been said to have “the effect of bullying them into silence” (“The rainbow”).

The contentious climate concerning youths’ access to information and advocacy about their gay identity speaks to a need for media that can offer such ideas. If gay youth are expected to feel comfortable and healthy in contemporary society, then they may need exposure to gay life outside of a homophobic atmosphere in the home or school. Given that Sinfield claims that theatre can be a powerful force in shaping public understandings, plays that address gay history, homophobia, and actively celebrate gay inclusion may then be useful in supplying youth with information about themselves. Furthermore, various scholars have referred to theatre’s special ability as a place of promoting gay awareness and inclusion. It is theatre’s connection to the immediacy of public thought that makes it an apt barometer of social change. Youth unable to find supportive portrayals of their experience in schools may see staged gay portrayals as a counter to those they experience elsewhere. Such portrayals may alter the ways they feel about themselves and their place in Canadian
society. If theatre is to be a site of reflection and community for gay youth, it will likely meet several challenges. Mainstream theatre’s programming likely needs to be more inclusive of youth interests in general, and its pricing may need to include heavy discounts for young attendees. Furthermore, an understanding of the history of how gays have been represented on stage and a sensitivity towards creating realistic and whole representations are likely essential.

What kind of gay representation?

Examining the plays in this study, and how homosexuality is contextualised in their performances, invites further questions about whether these gay plays could offer gay persons understandings, community, history, and reflection of their homosexuality. As this study reveals, staged representations of gay men often fail to make them sexually active. Additionally, some of these texts replay negative characterisations associated with gays. For example, Playwright has substance abuse problems; Young Man’s work has illegal aspects to it; and Harvey’s sex life can be considered promiscuous. Questions arise about how these various characterisations work to advance or hinder gay identity and inclusion. If such characterisations in fact are retrogressive in this regard, how might they affect gay audiences? This question leads to another query, namely why would gay playwrights (presumably interested in advancing gay inclusion) create such characters?

Several playwriting strategies may provide an answer. Basic ideas of the creation of theatre, and narrative in general, most readily come to mind. Scholars have long asserted that conflict is essential to drama (Wright 207; Hochman 229). Consequently, as media for examining gay issues, these plays use wide-ranging understandings of gay life to express the contentious place of gay and alternate sexualities in contemporary society. By calling on
or disputing negative characterisations of gays, they create spaces for dramatic conflict between opposing views and thus allow viewers a wide lens through which to examine and react to their own understandings concerning homosexuality.

One might ask why contemporary gay drama does not dispense with these characterisations, and merely create conflict and drama out of other aspects of modern gay experience? There are plays which portray gays without referencing the various misunderstandings, social pressures and inequalities in contemporary gay life to create conflict. Two of the playwrights from this dissertation address the place of gay rights in their work in interviews in Michael Heinze’s *Love, Sexuality and Identity*. Grignard says he writes to “influence the gay rights movement . . . [and] pushes for a change in attitude . . . [so the audience sees] the situation from the boy’s perspective” (35). MacLennan writes that he intends to “spark dialogue . . . challenge gay audience members, remind . . . them of their history, their responsibilities and their potential” and to let “straight people know our value” (35). MacLennan also qualifies how he believes mainstream audiences receive gay characters on stage. “People don’t balk at the presentation of gay people on stage. Still, we like them in certain ways” (37). This quote illustrates that while gays are accepted presences on contemporary stages, audiences have preferences as to how gays appear there.

Like MacLennan, certain audiences are accustomed to ways of perceiving homosexuals. Like Homer on the television show *The Simpsons*, who once pronounced that “I like my beer cold, my tv loud and my homosexuals flaming,” marginalising portrayals of gay men are considered normalised by some persons (“Homer’s”). The use of such characterisations may then be seen by playwrights as ways to address particular audiences which are less familiar with broad understandings of homosexuality. If potential members
of audiences are comfortable, and moreover in agreement with characterisations which marginalise gays, then these gay presences may offer an accustomed understanding, and so be less initially challenging. Viewers of *His Greatness*, familiar with Tennessee Williams’s public notoriety, may come to expect an addicted, dissolute, effete character in the play. Such a portrayal may not change their understanding of gay persons, and indeed may bolster understandings which underscore stereotypes of gay men. Yet, the narrative of *His Greatness* can potentially affect the perceptions of gay persons by members of the audiences by revealing the abject consequences of being gay in a time where gay relationships were not recognised.

Alan Sinfield points out that through drama (and other media) gays have found and made connections to the identities projected onto them by the dominant culture. He asserts the popularisation of the Wildean model as a public understanding of gay men’s nature was circulated through the twentieth century’s drama. For gay persons seeking understanding and references to their own sexuality, this widely circulated rendering of homosexuality acted as a model whereby gay men might identify themselves and others, even if the depiction maybe considered by some as negative, and disempowering (Sinfield, *Out* 3-4, 26, 307). Even though some men found the characterisation to be alien to them, it still provided a needed, if coded presence (305). Such characterisations are difficult to dislodge from the memory of members of the public whether gay or straight. The public’s saturation with the understandings of the Wildean model have been so ubiquitous that, over one hundred years after their coalescence, qualities associated with them are known broadly across society to signify gayness. As a way of dis-empowering their derogatory associations, numerous aspects of the Wildean model are now proudly performed by some
gay men as a way of reclaiming them as their own gay culture. What may be a considered a negative stereotype by some gay men is embraced by others.

Similar to the Wildean model, other gay characterisations have also become part of gay men’s self-understanding. Alan Sinfield comments about negative portrayals of gays onstage, writing that while “most of the representations of queerness . . . are hostile . . .” nevertheless “those were the terms on which lesbian and gay subcultural formation occurred” (Out 26). While the playwrights in this study were all under fifty years of age at the time they wrote these plays, they all would have encountered “hostile” representations of gay men in Canadian media while they grew up here. The pervasiveness of this marginalisation may lead contemporary Canadian playwrights to understand gay identities in such a way that a normalised homophobia has become an integral part of their understandings of gay men and thus, themselves. Alternately, such playwrights may well recognise a normalised homophobia, and use their playmaking to examine such issues. For example, MacLennan’s exploration of bullying, masculinity and gay desire takes homophobic behaviours that were normalised during the time of my teens, and allows audiences to see their foundations and contradictions.

If gay portrayals underscore understandings audiences already find alienating, will they find community, history, or reflection through this kind of theatre? Is the potential benefit that gay theatre has to offer harmed by practices that continue to marginalise gays in the theatre? If the answer to the last question is yes, are there ways to change practices, contextualise characterisations, and take advantage of the abilities that theatre has to create and support community without prescriptively telling playwrights how to write their plays or theatres how to mount them?
As our theatre continues to evolve, it may require vigilant and vocal audiences to express their wants in terms of the way they see gays on mainstream stages. This also needs to be considered in light of a common complaint of most theatres in Canada, that being their lack of young audience coming in to replace older patrons. Common business sense requires that any business address its own market’s attrition. Looking to the Arts Club’s attendance demographics confirms that few younger persons are in the audience. As discussed in Chapter Two, age and homophobia are positively correlated in the Canadian population. While mainstream theatres may value their older audience members’ patronage, and contain gay expressions on their stages in order to keep that sector of their audience, they may consider balancing that audience’s preferences with a need to ultimately replace them in time. While a financial risk may lie at the root of mainstream theatres marginalising gay presences, financial risk may ultimately also change such practices. If social inclusion for gay Canadians continues to advance, one might presume that practices that marginalise gays in theatre (and other media) may become less acceptable to larger portions of an audience, creating financial risk in the other direction. This is not an unrealistic projection. Economic pressures have changed gay representation in other media, with viewers both rewarding and punishing producers for the various ways gays and the sexual Other are represented. When Days of Our Lives allowed a gay couple, in 2007, its creators saw their viewership soar (Nahmod). In a similar vein, the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation instituted a boycott in 2012 against the television show Work It, claiming the show “will harm transgender people” (“Work”). The show was cancelled after two episodes.
In my own situation, as an audience member, I know of plays that neither my colleagues nor I will attend because of the ways gays are represented. In this regard there are likely others that find the same unease at the way those like us are portrayed onstage. Given this unease, an active audience member may be willing to voice what he wants out of contemporary theatre. This thesis shows that in terms of gay representation, he needs to speak to the theatre industry at all levels – from arts councils to artistic directors to playwrights to critics. This study may be a useful tool to those that wish to understand the ways and mechanisms through which his unease is generated.
Notes

1. Vito Russo notes similar narratives used to marginalise gay characters arising in American film of the era, and continuing after The Motion Picture Production Code (or Hays code) became reformulated in 1968. These include narratives showing gay men as dangerous (Russo 91, 127, 152), demented (163), diseased (161), and doomed (156, 166, 185).

2. There are certain anomalous theatres and theatre genres that do not fit well into this construction. "Little theatre", for example, is a genre of theatre practiced across the country, usually in smaller population centres. It usually operates non-professionally on small budgets. However its programming is overwhelmingly comprised of foreign scripts that have proven successful in other markets. As these facets characterise most Little theatre with traits of both mainstream and fringe theatre, it does not fit comfortably in this range.

3. When discussing theatre, the term naturalism refers to two differing meanings. Conventional and academic definitions of naturalism point to work that uses the stage as a laboratory for human behaviour, one based on a “mimetic realism” (Furst 4). This naturalism is related to realism as a subset of the latter, as both have a ‘mimetic representation of outer reality” but where naturalism “attempts to apply . . . the discoveries and methods of nineteenth century science” to the drama’s narrative (8). This kind of naturalism was popular at the turn of the last century, and is exemplified in plays by August Strindberg. However “naturalism” is also often used contemporarily to denote forms of realism like “kitchen sink drama”, which are based on a mimesis of real life, and a particular style of acting appropriate to that work (Banham 780). A number of referents in
this study use the term naturalism in this regard. Consequently this thesis uses the term to denote this second meaning.
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