

Searching for the Muse: Changing Inspiration

by

Caroline Gillis

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ABSTRACT

SEARCHING FOR THE MUSE: CHANGING INSPIRATION

Caroline Gillis
University of Guelph, 2014

Advisor:
Professor A. Filewod

The word muse or Muse has become synonymous with an artist's "inspiration." It's a somewhat old-fashioned notion that has changed over time, but it prevails in describing a kind of "divine intervention" for artists. But what does it mean when we refer to an actress as a playwright's muse? The composition of a play is largely the solitary world of the playwright, but the presentation of that play through live performance is a collaborative event. By using my own long-term working relationship (and friendship) as an actress with Canadian playwright Daniel MacIvor as a case study, I examine the validity of the concept of a "muse" with regard to the playwright/actor relationship. The ephemeral nature of live theatre dictates that the word be redefined to incorporate the reciprocal energy that flows between the playwright and the actor in the creation of a "character."

DEDICATION

For Daniel, and for our friends gone too soon...Tracy, Mark, Ken and Albert.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1 The Difficulty of Defining the Muse.....	7
Chapter 2 A Short History of Me and MacIvor: The Early Years and <i>See Bob Run</i>	10
Chapter 3 Revisiting the Meaning of a Muse.....	25
Chapter 4 A Short History of Me and MacIvor: <i>The Lorca Play</i>	31
Chapter 5 Anton Chekhov and Olga Knipper.....	40
Chapter 6 Bertolt Brecht and Helene Weigel...and Ruth Berlau.....	50
Chapter 7 Four Female Theatre Artists Talk about the Muse.....	57
Chapter 8 A Short History of Me and MacIvor: <i>A Beautiful View</i>	65
Chapter 9 An Interview with Daniel MacIvor.....	70
Chapter 10 Conclusion: Redefining the Muse.....	75
Works Cited.....	80

Introduction

In April 2012 the *Globe and Mail* published an article by Kate Taylor talking about my relationship with playwright Daniel MacIvor, as both an actor and a friend. “Solid, fleshy, gap-toothed and now middle-aged, Gillis may appear an unlikely muse, and yet MacIvor has written role after role for her” (Taylor). If I had to paraphrase the theme of the article on Taylor’s part it might read, “Huh?!”

Daniel MacIvor is a Cape Breton-born actor and playwright, penning works that include *See Bob Run*, *Wild Abandon*, *You Are Here*, *Monster* and *Was Spring*. He received the Governor General’s Literary Award for Drama for his collection of plays *I Still Love You* in 2006, and in 2008 he was the recipient of the prestigious Siminovitch prize in theatre. As an actress, I have appeared in the premieres of many of his plays including: *See Bob Run*, *Yes I Am and Who Are You?*, *Never Swim Alone*, *Jump*, *The Soldier Dreams*, *You Are Here*, *Communion*, *A Beautiful View*, and *Was Spring*.

It isn’t the first time I have been referred to as MacIvor’s muse and it always elicits from me a feeling of embarrassment and slight dread. By lining up four of my many insecurities in black and white (see above: “solid,” “fleshy,” “gap-toothed,” and “middle-aged”) Taylor provides solid evidence for that dread. Muses are hot. Muses are sexual tormenters. Muses don’t age. Muses aren’t overweight. In fact, they conjure images of being composed of an airy almost diaphanous quality and possess a nymph-like immortality. But what do we mean when we use the word “muse” in 2014? Taylor’s article sparked my interest in the phenomenon of the muse or lack thereof, especially in the realm of playwriting.

While the composition of a play, for the most part, is the solitary world of the playwright—the presentation of that play through live performance is an altogether different animal—the collaborative nature of a live theatre production incorporates many different artistic elements including performance, design, and direction. If the role of a muse exists for a playwright in the collaborative art of theatre, then what is the muse’s agency in the resulting creation? Assuming a muse does exist—then, an actor as muse cannot help but to have a creative agency in the resulting production, but what does that agency entail? Is credit deserved beyond being an inspiration and/or interpreter of the playwright’s words? And how does this relationship between the actor and the playwright affect the muse’s own work as an artist?

The changing nature of the muse over time might despoil the image of the ancient Greek Muses whose nine sisters inspired art, science and history through their musedom. As the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne the nine “embody the art and inspire creation with their graces through remembered and improvised song and stage, writing, traditional music and dance” (“Muse,” Wiki). Although divine, these goddesses weren’t all sweetness and light if you crossed them. When challenged by another group of nine sisters—daughters to a rich landowner, Pierus—to prove themselves in a singing competition, the Muses felt embarrassed to lower themselves to the competition, but felt it was worse to give in without a struggle (Ovid 124). Represented by Calliope, goddess of Epic Poetry, the muses essentially kicked “ancient Greek butt,” and as revenge turned the losing family of sisters into magpies.

“Our patience is not unlimited: we shall follow where our anger prompts, and proceed to punish you.” The Macedonian women laughed and scorned my threats, but as they tried to speak, menacing us with loud cries and wanton gestures, they saw feathers sprouting from their nails and plumage covering their arms. They looked at each other, watching their faces narrow into horny beaks, as a new addition was made to the birds of the forest. When they tried to beat their breasts, the movement of their arms raised them, to hover in the air. They had become magpies, the scandalmongers of the woods. Even now, as birds, they still retain their original power of speech. They still chatter harshly and have an insatiable desire to talk. (Ovid 133)

Francine Prose explores nine muses from the late 18th century and onward in her book *The Lives of the Muses*—from Hester Thrale to Yoko Ono. It is a look at a much more human muse than the Muses found in Greek mythology. In some cases the muse is exalted, in others the muse and/or artist is exalted, exploited and thrown aside; and although not all of the muses she examines have a sexual relationship with their artist, there always seems to be an undercurrent of sexual torment, on the part of at least one member of the muse/artist pairing. The muse fills the role of both the tormentor and the tormented in many of Prose’s cases. Three examples of the muse/artist relationship that Prose examines in her book include Hester Thrale and Samuel Johnson, Lee Miller and Man Ray, and Yoko Ono and John Lennon.

Hester Thrale, a writer and diarist of 18th century British life, and Samuel Johnson, a writer known for the *Dictionary* and *The Life of Savage* were an unpredictable match (Prose 28): spanning “the spectrum between best friends and dominatrix and slave, they were inarguably the

focus of one another's romantic attentions for almost two decades" (32). However, after the death of her husband Henry Thrale, Hester didn't automatically decide to wed Johnson, and when she eventually informed him of her intent to marry someone else, their relationship never recovered from the blow. In a letter Johnson says, "If I interpret your letter right, you are ignominiously married, if it is undone, let us once talk together. If you have abandoned your children and your religion, God forgive your wickedness" (47).

Lee Miller was a classic American beauty who had a three year love affair with photographer Man Ray as his model and muse, and after she left him to pursue her own successful career as a photographer, he spent two years reworking a canvas of her, "painting and rubbing out, and repainting the mouth of the muse who had abandoned him" (245).

With John Lennon and Yoko Ono there was a constant struggle over musedom and the question of "who the real artist was." In the 1970s "the Lennons tried to redistribute and share the roles of artist and muse, but finally gave up and 'got in touch' with their feelings of competition and territoriality" (366).

I am fascinated by the fact that the inspiration of a muse is mostly elicited by male artists. Prose explores that phenomenon: "That so many muses seemed to have functioned as nearly blank screens for their artists to project on points to yet another reason for the rarity of male muses [...] women seem less inclined to idealize men to the point of featureless abstraction. Perhaps for reasons connected with the survival of the species, women are trained to pay close attention to the particular needs, the specific qualities of an *individual* man, while men often find it more useful for the purposes of art to worship a muse who fulfils a generic role: The Ideal Woman" (12). The Ideal Woman? This is where my embarrassment re-surfaces. How can "just a goof from Cape Breton" (a phrase that me and MacIvor often use to describe ourselves) like myself be considered the "ideal woman?" The images of tortured sexual tension don't apply to my relationship with MacIvor. However, as a straight female actress, perhaps, I did fit the bill as the ideal woman for a gay male playwright. I was able to embody his words on stage, as well as providing the role of a best friend off stage—which often included discussing our tortured romantic relationships with others. But that was in our youth, and as middle age crept up upon us, our torments and frustrations shifted to other more earthly concerns.

In the summer of 2012, I found myself at a crossroads in my life. I was piecing together an acting career of sorts, but as a sideline I was painting for money (walls not canvasses). I was tired. I was frustrated. I was aging. And being poor wasn't romantic anymore. I was respected in my field as a theatre actress, but respect does not translate into financial stability in the business of theatre. I was childless and living alone with my cat, Louise—who it might be argued was *my* muse on some level. My life as a “muse” for Daniel MacIvor was not progressing according to plan—which was 1) be a muse for Daniel and get people in the theatre world to know who I am 2) become respected in my craft and work at the Stratford and Shaw Festivals 3) my rave reviews become noticed by famous Hollywood film directors and my career as a film star takes flight 4) I meet and marry the perfect musician boyfriend in a country rock band, famous enough that I am envied, but not so famous that he has reason to stray 5) marry on the shores of Cape Breton and have six children while maintaining a thriving career as a film and sometime theatre star (when I want to get back to my roots) 6) have lots of cats and dogs 7) have houses in Toronto and New York and a farm in the country 8) live a happy and tragedy free life 9) enjoy a happy and lusty retirement with my musician husband who has never waned in his ardor and 10) die happy. But when I spoke to MacIvor on the phone on that summer afternoon I was conceding defeat. I didn't know what to do anymore. It was difficult to piece together a career anymore and I needed a new plan.

ME: I don't know what to do anymore.

HIM: I know what you should do.

ME: What?

HIM: You should go back to school.

ME: Really?

HIM: You should go to the University of Guelph and get your MA in Theatre Studies.

ME: That's a good idea.

Cut to me at the University of Guelph working on a thesis about my relationship with MacIvor. This is what led me to this auto-ethnographic case study of myself in relation to my work with a playwright. By reflecting on our work together I hope to discover or discount myself as a muse

for his work. The fact that the playwright whose work has defined my career made the suggestion to go back to school already says a lot about the changing nature of this playwright and his supposed muse.

In Chapter 1 I will address the difficulty of attempting to define the muse and discover its essence in relation to my work with Daniel MacIvor. Chapter 2 outlines my personal and professional history with MacIvor starting back in our mutual hometown of Sydney, Cape Breton and our eventual meeting in the Arts Centre at Dalhousie University in Halifax, to our life in Toronto as young artists who almost unknowingly fell into an independent theatre scene that was bringing with it a new tide of alternative work and theatre artists. I will chronicle our work together as playwright and actress starting with *See Bob Run* in 1987 along with other productions that took place in the late 80s and early 90s. Chapter 3 revisits the meaning of the word “muse” and assesses it in light of the new information that has been presented.

The second part of my personal history with Daniel MacIvor continues in Chapter 4 and focuses on *The Lorca Play* as an example of our roles as co-creators in a production. This chapter also includes anecdotes from a sampling of plays by MacIvor during the 90s and the early 2000s. As MacIvor moves into the world of direction it changes our status as actor/playwright into that of actor/director. How does that affect our working and personal relationships?

In Chapter 5 the search for the muse continues as I look at the personal and professional relationships of playwright Anton Chekhov and his actress/wife Olga Knipper, and I continue in this vein in Chapter 6 exploring the relationship between playwright Bertolt Brecht and his actress/wife Helene Weigel. This chapter also includes a look at Brecht’s relationship with his long-term mistress and creative collaborator Ruth Berlau. By examining these relationships I will attempt to draw a comparison between these playwright/actress relationships and my relationship with MacIvor. Were these women considered muses to their famous counterparts? And what was their part in the creation of the work, if any?

Chapter 7 presents a distillation of the material garnered from my conversations with four female theatre artists: Paulette Phillips, Valerie Buhagiar, Kirsten Johnson, and Alison Lawrence. I intend to shine a light on how the idea of a “muse” for playwrights sits with

contemporary female artists—and to find out if any of these women can cite an example of a “male muse” for a female.

In a continuation of my history with MacIvor in Chapter 8 I will focus on the idea of a “workshop” for a play, or a “workshop production” using MacIvor’s play *A Beautiful View* as an example to illustrate that process. The “workshop” of a play has become part of the journey for most new Canadian plays, but I think MacIvor’s take on the process might bring us closer to the possibility that an actor *can* be a muse for a playwright.

In Chapter 9 I head directly to the source providing a largely verbatim interview with Daniel MacIvor, and asking him the question: “Do you think I’m your muse?” Finally, in Chapter 10’s conclusion I will address my exploration and self-reflection, and assess whether or not the term muse is obsolete. Does the term have validity in 2014 in relation to the actor/playwright relationship? I will discount or credit myself as a muse for Daniel MacIvor and determine the validity of the concept as it relates to the collaborative nature of live theatre.

Chapter 1 - The Difficulty of Defining the Muse

So how can we define a “muse,” especially for the purposes of this paper? The word, as a noun, is ever changing in its meaning starting way back in ancient Greek times when it was still capitalized. It comes from the Greek *mousa* and the Latin *musa*. The Proto-Indo-European or (PIE) root according to the Online Etymology’s Dictionary means *men-“think.” The word has become synonymous with inspiration and my suspicion is that most people use the word in that context. Of course as a verb, the word means to ruminate on something—to muse. It has a meditative quality as a verb. Musing. Thinking. Pondering. Reflecting. All of these synonyms for the verb muse certainly inform how we think of the word “muse” as a noun. Throughout this paper I present the noun in three different ways: “muse”, Muse, and muse. Loosely “muse” translates as “if we assume there is such a thing” or “I am still questioning it myself.” Muse with a capital M usually means I’m referring to the Greek Muses, or human females who may have been exalted to a goddess-like status. And finally there’s an inherent acceptance in the term when I simply use—muse.

Although the idea and interpretation of what a muse “is” and “does” has changed, it is largely associated with, and understood as a female entity living through a male—the nine Greek Muses seemed to be single-handedly responsible for providing the creative resources to the man to produce his art. “The Muses were both the embodiments and sponsors of performed metrical speech: *mousike* (the English term "music") was just ‘one of the arts of the Muses.’ Others included Science, Geography, Mathematics, Philosophy, and especially Art, Drama, and inspiration. Some authors invoke Muses when writing poetry, hymns or epic history. The invocation typically occurs at or near the beginning, and calls for help or inspiration, or simply invites the Muse to sing through the author” (“Muse,” Wiki). This is interesting when one thinks of it in terms of an actor and a playwright. In that case the playwright is speaking through the actor. If an actor is a muse for a writer, according to Greek Muses, the Muse is the actual guiding hand of the works—in this case providing the words—in a divine intervention of sorts. As the embodiment of the works, then, the Muse must speak through both the writer and by default the actor. In this way the Muse creates an infinite and reciprocal relationship between the playwright and the actor. The energy doesn’t flow in a straight line from the actor to the playwright or vice versa, but rather seems more like a figure eight in terms of live theatre.

Muses came crashing down to earth when Victorian era poets like Robert Graves started using “muses” to inspire their work. This new era of “muses” was one where the artist chose his muse and not the other way around, as a general rule. Prose quotes Graves as saying: “A woman who concerns herself with poetry should, I believe, either be a silent Muse and inspire the poets by her womanly presence ... or the Muse in a complete sense...impartial, loving, severe, wise” (qtd. in Prose 15). While muses may have morphed into a human form of female inspiration, they—like the nine Greek muses before them—had the capability of withholding their musedom from their male “discoverer.” This, of course, could often set the stage for a love/hate connection which goes right to the heart of human nature—“we always want what we can’t have.” The power of the human muse lies in “her” ability to withhold her love and/or sexual favours to retain that power. And perhaps this reaching for “what we can’t have” is a fitting parallel for trying to find inspiration inside oneself to make a painting or write a poem or compose a thesis. I sat down and read Hesiod’s *Theogony* (an ancient Greek verse invoking the Muses) aloud to see if I could actually summon a Muse to inspire this thesis—a thesis where I’m already doubting my role as a Muse.

My relationship with the word “muse” is complicated. Somewhere in me perhaps I am flattered by this somewhat powerful position, but this of course subverts the actual nature of one’s own power in today’s world. The Greek Muses weren’t passive. They would turn on you if you questioned their musedom. If my musedom is questioned—and clearly I *am* questioning it—I still don’t have the power to turn doubters into magpies and have them sprout feathers if they question my place as a playwright’s Muse. There is no doubt, in my case, that the question arises, “Why does MacIvor always use her in his plays? Why her?” In fact, I have had actors wonder aloud to *me* why “he always works with the same people?” Why indeed? It’s an odd position to find oneself in—the insecure part is saying, “I know I am not worthy.” But my ego is saying, “Are you kidding me?” I’m not sure if they’re expecting an apology to this seemingly innocent musing. If you respond defensively then they say, “I didn’t mean you.” And if you respond supportively then in essence you are becoming complicit in curtailing your own employment by saying, “I know, he really shouldn’t hire me so much.”

So why? Well, MacIvor and I started as friends. We amused each other greatly. And in some ways I think we do fall in love with our friends at the beginning—it’s not a sexual love—

but there is a *falling* of sorts in friendship as well as romantic love. This is why I find the word “amuse” intriguing in relation to musedom. Friendship relies heavily on a shared sense of humour, and that humour often comes from a shared history or a common ground, such as where you grew up or the rehearsal hall, for example. A language develops and that’s why most friends who share the same sense of absurdity can laugh by just looking at one another. This bond of language and humour that I share with MacIvor started developing in our early twenties.

So is this musedom? Maybe...somewhat.

Chapter 2 - A Short History of Me and MacIvor: The Early Years and *See Bob Run*

When I met Daniel MacIvor in the Arts Centre at Dalhousie University in 1981 where I was getting my Bachelor of Arts in Theatre and he was in the Acting program, I had little idea of where this friendship would lead. Thirty-three years later, as I've suggested, we are still friends and I still perform in his plays on a fairly regular basis.

We both grew up in Sydney, Cape Breton—he was born there—I moved to Sydney from Grand Mira (a rural community about a forty minute drive from Sydney) in Grade 6. He was a year younger than me and in a different grade. We went to the same schools—St. Joseph's Elementary School and later Sheriff Junior High—although in high school I opted to attend the all-girl Holy Angels High School and he attended Sydney Academy. We lived about five minutes away from each other for about eight years of our lives, and we both attended mass at St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church which was right across the street from my house, but we never spoke. Being a boy, and being in a different grade in Sydney meant not speaking to one another. Even as an adult going back to Sydney for Christmas, when I no longer lived there, that phenomenon still persisted. I remember saying “Hi Neal” (not his real name) to one of my former classmates at a social event—a Cedar's Club “Boring Day” party that still happens in Sydney on Boxing Day every year—and he looked at me, startled and almost fearfully and kind of mumbled a hello back as if we were still back in the halls of Sheriff Junior High School and I was some crazy reckless teenager with a crush that I couldn't contain—you just didn't do that with a boy, even if you were 35.

So, when Daniel and I met on that fateful day in the purple-carpeted halls of the Dalhousie Arts Centre that houses both the Rebecca Cohn auditorium and the Dunn Theatre (where years later we would actually perform together in David Mamet's *Oleanna* for Neptune Theatre's Studio series) we connected almost immediately and laughed about the fact that we had known each other for years, but had never spoken. The acting school at Dalhousie was well-respected and only allowed a limited number of students into the program through auditions. Daniel was a part of that elite crowd (but not for long, he was restless when I met him)—I had auditioned as a naïve 18 year old two years earlier and didn't make it into the acting program. My fear made me return as a “lowly” BA student two years later after attending the College of Cape Breton (CCB). Yes, it was so long ago that the College of Cape Breton didn't even have

university status—it is now the University of Cape Breton (UCB). When I was attending CCB I was taking courses in English and Psychology, but spent most of my time working with Professors Harry and Liz Boardmore who had created a vibrant theatre community at the college, and although there were no official theatre courses, I spent most of my time there working with the Boardmores at The Playhouse—which now bears their name. I performed as one of the ingénues, Giacinta in *Scapino!*, said “fuck” for the first time on stage in Sam Shepard’s *Buried Child*, and played a Metis woman in a created piece called *A Louisburg Story*—loosely based on a true story about a French soldier falling in love with this feisty Metis woman when he was based at the Fortress of Louisburg. The main reason I secured the role was that I had long dark hair down to my waist, which could also be fashioned into two long braids.

At Dalhousie, Daniel and I did share one class—Theatre 101, I believe it was called. It was a smorgasbord of all things theatre production. We took classes in props, costumes and set design (complete with bandsaws and wood)—an overview of theatre behind the scenes. We bonded in that class over our crooked looking props that barely achieved the status of a Popsicle stick jewellery case, or a macramé owl wall hanging with buttons for eyes. Although, I was rather proud of one of the props I created for the stage. It was a plastic vase fashioned out of some kind of water bottle and spray painted gold. In it were stems of green pipe cleaners which were crowned with blossoms of tightly crumpled newspaper wads that I had spray painted in bright colourful hues. I had it proudly displayed on the mantel of my shared rental apartment, and woke up late one night to find that my two friends and roommates, after smoking a joint, had lit the paper blossoms on fire (just the blossoms burned, no tragedies here). They thought it was pretty funny at the time, but my career as a props master went up in smoke.

My friendship with Daniel really took off when we decided to hitchhike home to Sydney from Halifax for the weekend. We were failures at hitchhiking. We spent all our money in diners along the way eating greasy food. What is normally a five hour drive and maybe a seven hour hitchhike took us about eleven hours and we caved in Port Hawkesbury (about an hour or so from Sydney) and had to call Daniel’s mother to come to pick us up. I even wrote a play about it at the time called *Somewhere Between New Glasgow and Antigonish* (which is probably gathering mold somewhere in the attic of the house where I lived in Sydney). We failed miserably on the road, but our friendship was cemented.

At Dalhousie, Daniel was already friends with Amy House, a fellow acting student and very funny Newfoundlander. If anyone was his muse at that time it was Amy. Daniel wrote his first play *Blue Bells* for him and Amy to perform. It was a play about a married couple and Amy's character, as the long-suffering wife to Daniel's alcoholic husband, talks about how she passes her time at night waiting for her husband to come home by counting the little blue bells on the wallpaper. It was a simple and lovely little play, and a solid presentation of where Daniel was going to go with his career. Writing was now clearly an option. When they presented *Blue Bells* at Dalhousie, I was the stage manager. I don't think I was very good at it, though, because all I remember giving any real thought to was what I was going to wear in the booth.

After his first year at Dalhousie, Daniel spent a summer at the Stephenville Festival in Newfoundland through the encouragement of Amy House. He persuaded me to come the following summer. The Stephenville Festival was a combination of an acting school and a summer repertory company run by the late Maxim Mazumdar. I took acting classes there—surprisingly good classes—and was cast as background in the musicals *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat*. Daniel and I were lepers in *Jesus Christ Superstar*. It was a joyous summer of acting, and drinking and dancing at the Dugout Tavern with nothing but potential ahead of us.

Daniel ended up leaving the Acting program at Dalhousie and eventually moving to Toronto and attending George Brown College. By then I was living with my musician boyfriend (yes, I did have one) in Halifax—and having graduated from Dalhousie I was working in a pleasant enough office, after a horrifying three months as a directory assistant for Maritime Tel and Tel. We stayed in touch and Daniel kept asking me to move to Toronto. "I'll write you a play. I'll write a play for you if you come." It took some persuading, but I was doing nothing but complaining about *not* being an actress in Halifax and in 1985, I decided to move to Toronto. I left my musician boyfriend behind and we tried to maintain a long distance relationship (it didn't work). When I arrived in Toronto and met Daniel he said, "Okay, we have ten days. Then, I'm moving to Vancouver." He had found love. Great. I stayed in Toronto and started to acclimatize myself to the city and I started seeing plays. The first play I saw was at the Poor Alex Theatre—I cannot remember the name of it or the plot or anything—but I'm quite convinced it was some former George Brown student friends of Daniel's, and I remember I was quite impressed. But I

was impressed with everything I saw. I was so wide-eyed that I may as well have been wearing a straw hat and chewing on a piece of straw.

November 7, 1985 – Letter from MacIvor in Vancouver to Gillis in Toronto

Dear Caroline,

Sitting in an almost greasy spoon. I come here every couple of mornings for an almost Toronto greasy breakfast. I'm not too sure they want me sitting here and writing but that's life. I scoured the want-ads and my stomach turns at the thought of having to go out and get some horrible job. They say it's very hard to find work here but I gotta!

Later

I'm home now. I couldn't stay there once my meal was finished. Well, the only job that seems to be available to me is one that Tony came up with. In a service station. God Caroline, I know dick about cars. I don't even know how to check oil.

Everybody here is very into cars and fitness. Great! Cars and fitness. I'm just a nut about cars and fitness. I don't know which I like better cars or fitness. Gee! I guess I just love them both.
(MacIvor)

Less than two months after his departure Daniel returned. Much to my selfish relief the relationship hadn't worked out in Vancouver. But this restless nature and the search for love was to dominate a lot of Daniel's work at that time.

We started doing some small theatre stuff together when he got back to Toronto. AIDS was raising its fatal spectre and I remember one of my first big moments on stage was as part of the "Safe Sex Cabarets" that Buddies in Bad Times Theatre was hosting in the mid-eighties. Daniel had written four monologues called *Different Kinds of Dancing* and I was ecstatic to be performing the role of Candy in one of them. In 1986 we did a tiny production of MacIvor's called *The Never Broken Heart* at the Rivoli Café in co-production with another play for two nights only. The company for that performance was called The Chalk Line and the evening was called "On the Line" and this was a quote from the back of the program: "The chalk line is the line between the people and the players. As players we can stand behind it, on it, or we can risk crossing it. Tonight we are on the line" (MacIvor, Program notes). I figured this was it!

I returned to my job as a dishwasher at the By the Way Café. My musician boyfriend and I were over, and I remember going home with my arms raw up to my elbows from washing pots pans and turning on the TV to find my ex's new actress girlfriend accepting an ACTRA award (yes, the ACTRA awards on TV) for best performance in a radio play or some such thing. It was kind of a low point. MacIvor was still trying to write something for me and would occasionally present me with scenes and excerpts from plays that he was working on for me. There were other early MacIvor plays that I was not in—I was sad not to perform in *The Right One* which he co-wrote with Michelle Jelly for Buddies in Bad Times Theatre's "Rhubarb Festival"—which were three monologues about love. In the end it is revealed that all the characters are in love with the same person, oddly enough, a Toronto Transit Commission streetcar driver. When MacIvor wrote *Material Benefits* for Buddies in Bad Times' "Four Play Festival"—I remember being so envious—I thought it was just the coolest play in the world. It was the story of a young straight couple living in their funky downtown Toronto apartment, whose lives are turned upside-down when a female friend introduces them to her gay male friend who ends up having an affair with the "straight" male in the couple. I was feeling covetous of the female roles Daniel was writing. Now that I didn't have the safety net of a boyfriend in Halifax to run back to (he still has my Roseanne Cash albums by the way) I was chomping at the bit to be an "actress."

At the By the Way Café, I graduated from dishwasher to counterperson/cook and finally to waitress. In 1987 I was working there when my ex decided he was going to marry his new "working" actress. I was traumatized and it spurred something in MacIvor—my friend and playwright. He said he felt he had to write my play now. He showed up at the café one afternoon when I was working and said he had written me a play. I was very excited about the prospect of being in a rehearsal room and working with a full cast of actors with a part for me—at last! "But there's a catch" he said—"What's that?" I replied—"It's a one-woman show." Our accounts vary on this part of our history—he says I told him I wouldn't move to Toronto unless he wrote me a one-woman show—but I *know* that I was terrified at the prospect of a one-person show, and I distinctly remember standing there with my black waitress belt tied around my waist (ignoring my customers) and saying, "No, no, no, I can't do a one woman show. I'm too scared." But I did do it and that was *See Bob Run*. I was to play the titular role of Bob "short for Roberta."

So, I don't know whether it was "musedom" or inspiration or just an urgency to write something for his friend, but he presented me with a beautiful play about a young woman hitchhiking east to "get to the water" leaving behind in her apartment the dead musician boyfriend she had shot and killed.

May 11, 1987 – Gillis Journals

Last night we read through my new play written by Danny—*See Bob Run*. I really believe it's a wonderful piece of theatre that will knock people off their feet. I really do and the wheels are already in motion to have it produced. Please. Please. Please. Also, last night we recorded Ronnie's [singer/songwriter Ron Doug Parks] "Love in a Cage" [...] to use at the beginning [...] of the play. I think things are turning around. I really do. (Gillis)

We worked with the late Ken McDougall as director on the play and I think we both owe a lot of what we know about theatre to him. We had a professional director who took us through the process. We got \$2000 in seed money from Buddies in Bad Times theatre and we opened at the Poor Alex Theatre which was basically across the street from the By the Way Café. Ken McDougall was not only a director, but an actor and he had some background in dance and choreography. He taught us so much and I look back and think, I really had no idea of how to be an actress beyond producing emotions of "happy" or "mad," and Ken opened my eyes in so many ways. *See Bob Run* managed to be staged because of Ken's participation, not to mention the work of the late Albert Chevalier (Daniel's partner at the time). Buddies seed money combined with Albert's credit card basically got the production on stage.

Aside from Ken's professional standing as a director there was still an uneasy feeling that maybe this production was just a couple of steps above when, in Grade 6, my friend and neighbour Dorothy decided she was going to rent St. Joseph's Church Hall to put on a concert. This was all based on the fact that she wanted to sing "One Tin Soldier" (a hit at the time) in front of a crowd. She felt her rendition deserved public performance. It was her favourite song and this was pre-American Idol years, so what was an 11 year old girl to do? Rent a church hall to showcase her talents. Dorothy wasn't a great singer, slightly nasal, with absolutely no training and zero interest in singing until she finally met a song she had to sing—"One Tin Soldier." As she rehearsed the song in her bedroom, or walking home from school, or over banana seat bike rides she kept saying, "I can't get the high part. I can't get the high part." I think the high part

was the chorus “Go ahead and hate your neighbor, go ahead and cheat a friend” part of the number. But Dorothy had chutzpah for a young Catholic girl, and decided on a variety show—without too much thought as to the actual “variety” of the show—except that her rendition of “One Tin Soldier” would be the crown jewel (or showstopper) in the midst of the “variety.” I was deemed as the perfect person to “take tickets at the door.” She made the call and started the process of renting the hall. The wheels were actually in motion for the rental by a Grade Six student from St. Joseph’s Elementary School, but unfortunately the priest got wind of the “concert” and called Dorothy’s parents—and the variety show was cancelled.

So maybe there was the undercurrent of that feeling during *See Bob Run*. Was somebody going to call the priest and have him put the kibosh on the whole thing? We also had chutzpah but—and I’m not sure if this was for the opening of *See Bob Run* or the remount—MacIvor and I both nixed Albert’s idea of releasing 100 pink balloons for the opening (pulling in the themes of a pink dress and a pink lake from the play). Albert’s idea was well-meaning and he was a beautiful soul, but the balloons just had the tinge of a “One Tin Soldier” variety show about them. But, that feeling of “Oh my God, somebody called the priest and we’re going to be found out as frauds” might still follow us on some level.

With *See Bob Run*, Daniel left the direction to Ken McDougall and Steve Lucas (an emerging young designer at the time) designed a simple set, composed of a car seat centre stage, the painted broken lines of a highway, and a fragment of fencing denoting the side of the road. Ken encouraged me to quit my job at the By the Way Café, and that step did enable me to completely immerse myself in the play. I was extremely broke, but extremely happy. Sort of.

July 7, 1987 – Gillis Journals

Rehearsals seem to be going well, but slowly [...] Bob is actually opening two weeks from today. I’m starting to get scared [...] I have to start immersing myself in Bob. I have to know her inside out. I won’t have Ken to coach me between scenes. But I will work harder and harder—I believe in this project and it is the play that matters most [...] If I stretch myself to the limit everything will fall into place. I quit my job last week. I hope I never have to waitress again.

July 16, 1987 – Gillis Journals

Jon Kaplan from Now Magazine is going to do an article on us and they're going to use my picture in NOW Magazine! That's amazing. Please God let it be wonderful. Please let 1987 finish better than it started.

July 26, 1987 - Gillis Journals

Today is the sixth day of performance for *See Bob Run* and it is also the day that [my ex] is getting married. I'm not even upset today. I feel quite calm [...] Bob is going very well. I got great reviews and pictures in the Globe and Mail, the Star and Now Magazine. Opening night was packed with friends, and I was so high after the show. I never thought I could fly that high in my life. Amazing [...] but now when I should be so happy I keep thinking "What is it all about? I mean really." I want to live in the country. (Gillis)

When we worked on *See Bob Run* we just wanted to do a play. I knew it was something special when I read it, but I could not have predicted that I would age to the point of seeing the play I premiered—remounted over and over again—without me. I was very possessive about the play that has become a staple for young actors to use for audition pieces to this day.

See Bob Run changed our lives personally and professionally. Daniel put himself on the map as a playwright and I started getting auditions for other plays. *Somewhere I Have Never Travelled* was part of Tarragon Theatre's 1988 season. Daniel had written the play about a Cape Breton family while a member of the Playwrights' Unit at Tarragon under the direction of Urjo Kareda. I wasn't initially cast in the role of Dolly (named for Daniel's sister) in the play. I auditioned, but I think they thought I was too young and/or too inexperienced for the role—but when the actress who had been cast had to drop out, the director Andy McKim offered me the role which I gleefully accepted. MacIvor was still not the director of his own work and though he hoped the part would be mine, he didn't have that influence as yet. As an actor in the play, I could certainly relate to the Cape Breton roots of *Somewhere I Have Never Travelled*, the story of a family re-visiting their lives after the death of the alcoholic patriarch of the family. I hadn't experienced an alcoholic parent directly in my youth, but certainly it was present in my extended family. Playing a young Cape Breton wife came fairly naturally, but in this case it was Daniel's family who inspired the play. To be produced on the mainstage at Tarragon Theatre was a pretty big deal for a young playwright, and he was opening the season. The reviews for the play and for

Daniel in particular were brutal. They almost had the feeling of “putting this young whippersnapper of a playwright” in his place. It was heartbreaking when one of the reviewers took a story the character of the father, Buck, tells, about being purposely walked across the thin ice of a frozen river (by his own father) in a cruel test of whether or not Buck would fall through, and the critic sneered that he thought MacIvor was “stretching it” with that one. The story, which was the kernel from which the play sprang, was true. I haven’t found any of the original reviews in my own personal archives, but the following letters from Daniel, written not long after the horrific reviews—from Calgary where he was playing Tom in a production of *The Glass Menagerie*—show that they had left a mark.

February 5, 1989 – Letter from MacIvor in Calgary to Gillis in Toronto

Oh Caroline oh Caroline oh Caroline [...] I’ve been fucked again. By the critics that is. One paper called me “lacking passion” and the other said I was “the weak link in the play.” Okay. It did make me feel better that Stage West’s YOUR PLACE OR MINE starring Jesse White “the loneliest man in town from the Maytag commercials” got better reviews. I can’t help but feel that this year is a conspiracy to drive me out of the country. I know it doesn’t mean reality or whatever. Don’t worry, I’m handling this one much better, tonight I’ll be fine once I’ve faced the rest of the cast and the crew and heard everybody tell me a hundred times that it doesn’t mean anything [...] And then there’s this remnant of Catholicism which creeps into my head and tells me I’m being punished for some grievous crime. Ah fuck [...] everything happens for a reason. I’ll learn some lesson, some day.

February 10, 1989 – Letter from MacIvor in Calgary to Gillis in Toronto

More reviews came out and were glowing. So I guess that’s okay. But I think I’ve learned my lesson. Let them kick you in the head but if they try to kiss you don’t let them stick their tongue in your mouth. Or something like that. I’ve been thinking a lot lately about the nature of my work and why the hell I’m doing it. Sure as fuck I’m not doing it for the critics; for myself? Well I guess. For me and the people I love. Maybe I can learn to love the audience. But doing ‘Menagerie’ is nice and everything but really I can’t see myself doing this for the rest of my life. It’s just all so safe. Just the nature of this kind of theatre, even new plays, is safe. Bob wasn’t safe. Steve [the character from his one-man play *Wild Abandon*] isn’t safe. *Somewhere* certainly wasn’t safe. And here I am trying to write this safe little play for Tarragon. WHY? Christ I

hope we get the money for *White Trash* [a collective creation in the works]. (MacIvor)

Something changed in MacIvor after the reviews for *Somewhere I Have Never Travelled*, and he started to question what a play really was—as well as his relationship with Kareda and the Playwrights' Unit at the Tarragon Theatre. It was around this time that Daniel and I met some members of the Augusta Company, a new and innovative indie theatre company which consisted of Daniel Brooks, Don McKellar and the late Tracy Wright. We went to see a production they were doing at the Toronto Fringe Festival in 1989 called *Indulgence* and it jarred both of us into a different reality of what theatre was. As a “couple of goofs from Cape Breton” we had no idea that theatre could be that way. It was meta-theatre at its finest. Plays within plays. Interviews with the actual actors—Tracy, Don and Daniel as themselves onstage, interviewing each other, while they were performing—it was funny and smart and exhilarating to watch. The play within the play was called *Sometime Come Often* and it was a Canadian “kitchen sink” play complete with Wright as the mother, constantly stirring something in her mimed mixing bowl, and Brooks as the son who comes home from “away,” who is wrestling with the fact that he has to tell his parents he is gay. MacIvor had heard about the play, and was convinced that the play within the play was directly related to *Somewhere I Have Never Travelled* and we kind of slunk in our seats a bit every time they spoke the name of their play within a play: *Sometime Come Often*. Through a mutual friend we ended up having beer and pizza with the members of the Augusta Company on a patio somewhere near Bloor and Bathurst. They denied that *Sometime Come Often* was directly related to our play, and it was only Brooks who had actually seen *Somewhere I Have Never Travelled*. We hung out that night, but after we left, I remember remarking to MacIvor, “They are really talented people, but kind of distant.” I had no idea what history would follow with this amazing group of humans.

MacIvor's working relationship and friendship was just beginning to germinate with Daniel Brooks, but in the late 80s while still a member of the Playwrights' Unit at Tarragon he wrote the first draft of *Never Swim Alone*. He brought the play to Kareda who told him that it was good writing but “not a play.” The critical failure of *Somewhere I Have Never Travelled*, the meeting with the Augusta Company, and the debate over whether or not *Never Swim Alone* was a play, inspired MacIvor to write *This is A Play* which we performed at the 1992 Toronto Fringe Festival.

Never Swim Alone was produced as a play—not by Tarragon—but by MacIvor’s recently formed company, da da kamera theatre (loosely translated as “yes, yes to the small room”) and Platform 9 Theatre. Platform 9 was Ken McDougall’s company with playwright, Robyn Fulford and was known for innovative works that included Fulford’s *Steel Kiss* and later (co-produced with da da kamera and Ed Roy’s Topological Theatre) the collective *White Trash, Blue Eyes*. *Never Swim Alone* was performed at the previous Queen Street West venue of The Theatre Centre in 1991. It was February and I was wearing a bathing suit. Sometimes I wonder if it wasn’t musedom on Daniel’s part, but a friend trying to help me overcome my fears onstage. A bathing suit. Of course, at the time, I thought I was fat. I was not. But there is something about the stage that changes you. You might find yourself modest at the Scadding Court Public pool in downtown Toronto sporting a bathing suit with pasty skin and an imagined pot belly—quickly hiding yourself with a towel when you come out of the water—but on stage there’s a magic that takes place which enables you to own and honour certain aspects of yourself that you might not necessarily feel in real life. I wore that costume with a confidence that I was the best thing that ever walked in a bathing suit. If anything can be symbolic of a muse it is the character of the Referee, the female lifeguard in *Never Swim Alone*—perched upon her chair, towering above the two businessmen who look to her to decide their petty arguments in a tense game of one-upmanship. In an interview with the *Toronto Star* in 1991 I shared my struggle with higher status and grace: “It’s a great part for me because it’s very different from what I’ve been doing. I get cast very easily now as the runaway, the prostitute, or the loser. But this woman is a figure of worship, which is something I’m not quite used to. It’s also very stylistic, with a lot of moving and talking at the same time, which I’ve always had trouble mastering. I’m learning to be graceful” (Wagner, *Toronto Star*).

McDougall’s production and Steve Lucas’s design certainly supported the “lifeguard as muse” theme. This production of the play started with the girl/muse under a sheet with only her hand showing as the audience entered the space fifteen minutes prior to the show. I remember my hand would become icy cold while I waited for my co-stars to enter and lift the sheet, bringing to life the dead muse as the play began. As the audience entered I was close enough to hear people talk about the hand, wondering if it was real and “if there was really someone under there?” Sometimes I could even hear people whispering “Caroline, psst, Caroline”—it was a freaky experience. I was only supposed to be immobile under the sheet for about twenty minutes,

and when the pre-show music played the song “Sunshine Lollipops” it was my cue that the play was about to start. The play became a hit and on the first Sunday pay-what-you- can performance I waited in vain for the song which was my cue and savior. There were so many people at the box office (and a new employee selling the tickets) that I ended up lying there for almost an hour—it was a late start. My hand was numb. But with the help of my co-stars, MacIvor and Robert Dodds (as the character Frank) I was finally pulled from my numbness and atrophy into the life of the play.

When the play was later remounted at Theatre Passe Muraille, I did not reprise the role. I had auditioned for director Richard Rose for Timberlake Wertenbaker’s *Our Country’s Good*, a production to be done at the Great Canadian Theatre Company in Ottawa and got the part, which conflicted with the remount of *Never Swim Alone*. It was the first time I would say no to a Daniel MacIvor play, but it was in an effort to expand my theatrical horizons. If I could have done both I would have. This is where the personal and the professional become almost too intertwined. I spoke to Ken McDougall first about not doing the part again, but I told him I wanted to tell MacIvor myself. Ken agreed, but later when Ken and I were walking through the “gay ghetto” where he lived, we saw Daniel walking down Church Street on the other side and Ken yelled across—“She’s not doing the play anymore!” Daniel was fine with it all as far as I remember, but it probably did mark the separation of our careers in a way. Perhaps it freed both of us up to go in other directions...but the working relationship and friendship would prevail.

In 1992 MacIvor and I performed together in *This Is a Play* at the Toronto Fringe Festival. He had, as I’ve already suggested, written it in response to the idea of what a play should be, and what elements it should contain. In this case the play was made up of a young male actor, a young female actor, and an older (and wiser) female actor. There are possible love interests, there is subtext, there is a mystery and a twist—and in the end the curmudgeonly Older Female Actor (played by Judith Orban) comes forward and delivers a monologue putting all the pieces of the puzzle together. The seemingly gruff and no-nonsense character of the Older Female Actor saves the day and explains the play: “And now I step forward to wrap things up—but God knows why since no effort was made to create a plausible plot. And so I explain that as a girl I had triplets—those two and the dead brother [...] marked them with a lettuce tattoo and

gave the boys to a foster home and only the recently dead one knew about it and so on and so on and more exposition” (MacIvor 99).

The play was a huge hit, we were probably the most successful show of that festival after Mump and Smoot—nobody could top those clowns. With a cast of three actors and only one lettuce each for our props, we performed on a bare stage at the Bathurst Street Theatre, again under the direction of Ken McDougall. We laughed so much in rehearsals that we were unsure of whether or not the audiences would feel the same—it felt as if maybe they would stare at us in wonder at the over the top performances and the absolute silly nature of the humour. We all kind of gagged a little when we did our hour long tech run on the stage at the theatre—it was huge compared to the tiny studios we had been rehearsing in up till then. On opening night, about half an hour before curtain, we were practicing our “big choreographed number” for the end of the show which involved fancy footwork and the lettuce props—and we were horrified to realize that we had forgotten to buy the lettuces before the show. We had left them till the last minute so they wouldn’t rot in the dressing room. We frantically found the technical director for the space, Roger West (who I am sure had better things to do), and begged him to buy us three lettuces up on Bloor Street—and God love him, he obliged. Thank you Roger.

After the critical failure of *Somewhere I Have Never Travelled*, a shift started happening in MacIvor’s work. Changes were starting to happen for him creatively, and he was starting to look at the way a play could be made. In 1989 he wrote *Yes I Am and Who are You?* for the “Rhubarb Festival” which was directed by Ed Roy. In it I played a sculpture in an art gallery alongside actor Steve Cumyn as a companion art piece, while a gay male couple strolled around us discussing the work. I was clothed in a tight white faux-leather dress which was fitted with large fake breasts and I wore a long white-blonde curly wig and white hose—my face and arms were also painted white—I was the personification of a stereotypical Muse in that get-up—but as the play goes on the wig comes off, as well as the fake breasts and the real person under the personification is revealed. But the discomfort I feel about being categorized as a Muse was similar to the discomfort I initially felt when rehearsing the part in *Yes I Am and Who are You?* Again, I was ratted out by Ken and received this letter from Daniel who was still in Calgary.

January 30, 1989 – Letter from MacIvor in Calgary to Gillis in Toronto

Ken mentioned that you were having some trouble with YES I AM AND WHO ARE YOU? [...] For me the show is a reaction to a couple of things. First of all the seeming impossibility of maintaining a “romantic” relationship and the seeming impossibility of presenting ART without having it condemned (or praised for that matter) only from the point of view of the viewer. [...] As the piece of art you should think of yourself first as the artist who created it. To be quite honest the part was written for you in the same way that Bob was. These are things that I want to say and the only person other than me who could possibly say and understand is you. [...] The female artist has a coolness about her in the first part of the play which is betrayed by the final honest monologue where you admit to your feelings of being ineffectual and invisible [...] I know you don’t deal with your work in this cerebral way so maybe I can put it better by saying that the play as far as you are concerned is about fucked up love and bullshit and the shit of experience. As far as the sexy thing is concerned [...] for god’s sake don’t get hung up on it. The character obviously likes sex, she as much as says that. All you have to do is say it and the audience knows it right? And you are sexy. So. There. (MacIvor)

In rehearsals, Ed Roy made me dance with him to Prince, or something equally sexy, until I finally found that “inner sensual art piece” that lurks in all of us. I eventually believed in the character’s musedom...or something at least akin to musedom...and then as the play proceeded I had to let it all go again as the character’s trappings of the “ideal woman” are dismantled in front of the audience. The production was beautifully realized under Roy’s direction and design, and it was clear that Daniel was starting to branch out in his choice of directors. In the following year at “Rhubarb” he followed up with *Theatre Omaha’s Production of the Sound of Music*, again directed by Roy. My musedom was now gone and I was playing a trashy, tough, single white Mom auditioning for the role of Maria in *The Sound of Music*, along with an old woman on a respirator, a sexually repressed nun-like character, and a gay black male actor. We were abused by the artistic director and had to perform our “auditions” in a boxing ring. The sadistic artistic director was played by Earl Pastko and his trusty sidekick was played by Ken McDougall. If there were any likenesses to the methods of experimental director Hillar Liitoja in this comedic play they were purely unintentional, but Liitoja seemed to enjoy the show

and came back for all five performances. He was very vocal, oohing and awing and laughing in recognition of himself and of something he thought, perhaps, mirrored his style. During this period Daniel also wrote another one-person play—this time for himself—*Wild Abandon*. This was followed by *2 – 2 Tango* at the Toronto Fringe Festival in 1990, again directed by Ken McDougall, and a new kind of choreographed blocking and choreographed language was starting to emerge in Daniel’s work with Ken. The words along with Ken’s direction and choreography paved the way for *Never Swim Alone* which would completely embrace a combination of a kind of natural, yet heightened (through carefully choreographed language and movement) meta type of theatre that was now intriguing MacIvor.

MacIvor’s sensibility about the theatre was changing rapidly in the early 90s, and it was around this time when he started to work with Daniel Brooks and they created the play *House* together. It started to show another side of MacIvor, and arguably his mother and the Catholic Church were the muses for this piece in a big way. The theme of the “search for love”—started changing into a look at the larger picture of a life. Daniel performed in the one-person play *House* himself and when he walked out on to a virtually bare stage, with only a folding wooden chair at centre—and before saying a word—took the chair and flung it into the wings it was electrifying, and I knew something big was changing. It was the beginning of a new esthetic for him, incorporating his own changing ideas about theatre and merging them with Daniel Brooks’ esthetic—and his Augusta Company influences—and this was the beginning of a da da kamera style and design that would continue to develop. MacIvor went through a phase where he really wanted nothing on the stage except the actor and the words with support from lighting and sound—but sets minimal. This was setting—or un-setting—the stage for a da da kamera aesthetic that would start with *House* and become more and more stylized as he worked his way through a trilogy of one-man shows with Brooks, from *Here Lies Henry* to *Monster* to *Cul de Sac*.

Chapter 3 - Revisiting the Meaning of a Muse

So am I Daniel's muse? It's hard to say at this point. It seems we were connected by our friendship and our common goals. We definitely had a bond that was strengthened by the fact that we had the same sense of place—Sydney was in our blood, Cape Breton was in our blood. Even though we never spoke as children or teenagers we had the same points of reference in people, places, and things. Sydney Academy, Holy Angels, the heavy-set girl who tap danced till she was out of breath at every school variety show, the Mayflower Mall, Smothermans Lounge, Matt Minglewood, shooting the drag on Charlotte Street, Meat Cove, Tallboys restaurant on *Another World*, MacLeod's Bookstore, Ike's Delicatessen, fries and gravy at the Maple Leaf Restaurant, roller skating at the Centennial Rink, Action Week, Whitney Avenue, that son of a bitch Father Nash at St. Joseph's Church, and the Vogue Theatre to name (quite) a few. But we also worked together out of circumstance. No one was clamoring to hire us in 1985. No one really knew who we were. We didn't think about Doras (Toronto's theatre awards), we barely knew what they were. We just wanted to "rent the church hall" and put on a play. And finally, circumstance turned into some success and, of course, that success led to an economic benefit that came with our friendship/work scenario. Being in MacIvor's shows allowed us to hang out and work and laugh, and be paid at the same time.

The interpretation of MacIvor's words on my part, perhaps, draws in a sense on the Greek Muses in that there is a certain way that the words sing through you, especially when the part is written with you in mind for performance. But in that case wouldn't MacIvor be *my* muse as a performer? He was providing the platform through which I could speak. This is why the concept of a "muse" for a playwright becomes more confused. There is a third party involved and that is the character.

The feminist in me of course has to denounce the very idea of the muse, because it in some way diminishes my work as an artist. As an actor one cannot help but have agency in a play once it becomes a live performance, but this doesn't mean you had agency in writing the play. But my understanding of MacIvor's material is enhanced by my understanding of where we both come from, geographically and ideologically. It injects the work with a reality and a truth that illuminates the play on a different level, or at least I hope to think so. This is why my performance in a MacIvor play would probably be superior to my performance in a Chekhov

play or a Brecht play (I've done neither), as I have a direct line to the writer that in many ways informs the performance.

I have watched MacIvor become a very good director and I still learn from him. He absorbs all that he is watching. He knew he wasn't ready to direct when we were doing *See Bob Run*, and he soaked up everything he could from directors Ken McDougall, Edward Roy and later Daniel Brooks. He wasn't afraid to change—in fact I believe he knew he had to—and he became fearless about cutting anything in his prose that seemed too “purple” or anything that didn't move the play forward—I watched him toss a whole play in the garbage once and the actress in me whimpered, “But there's a really good monologue for me in there...” I just wanted to act. Daniel wanted to be a better writer and theatre artist.

He wrote *See Bob Run* for me, but it was his play, his words. Was it my story? No. Did my life influence the play in some way? Yes. There were certain elements that may have been drawn from my life in small ways. My best female friend, in my early twenties, when I lived in Halifax was wild and funny and she brought that side out in me—we loved seeing live music and made friends with lots of bands back in the day. In *See Bob Run*, Bob's best friend is Tamara, a wild and wise sidekick that Bob describes to the audience—she was someone who Bob partied with, drank with, and went to see bands with. There's even be a reference to “fringe boots” (yes, boots with fringes on them) which my Halifax friend and I sported in our wild and crazy days—we bought them at Zellers in Sydney on sale—we couldn't believe they weren't all snapped up at full price! So I believe Bob's friendship with Tamara was inspired by my personal friendship, but once a character makes it onto the pages of the play (of course, in the case of Tamara, she is just talked about in the one-person play), that character ceases to be a part of the real or biographical world. Tamara takes on a life of her own through Daniel's words, and through an actor the interpretation of those words takes the character a step deeper into the world of the play. Daniel was aware that anything in the play that correlated with my life would give another layer to the performance of the character, but the character and the play are still his creations. I had a musician boyfriend, as did Bob's character, but my boyfriend was nothing like Bob's Timmy Prince (and his band Fingerprints), and I didn't shoot my ex in the head because “he loved me too much” as Bob sadly does. Okay, maybe it flashed through my mind ever-so-briefly when he was marrying another woman on the east coast at the exact same time I was doing a

matinee of *See Bob Run* in Toronto. (Good performance that day—anger very real!) Bob’s travelling east makes sense—she is looking for purification of a sort from the ocean—and I think as two east coasters in Toronto, one of the things Daniel and I both missed when we first moved there was the ocean. It’s the healing...it’s the air.

So, certainly I inspired some of the choices made for the characters in *See Bob Run*, but then so did my best friend in Halifax. And so did Ron Doug Parks a singer/songwriter who I used to sing with sometimes at open-mic type events. Parks was also a transplanted east coaster and we were practicing some songs in my kitchen in Toronto one day and MacIvor dropped by—and we were singing one of Ron’s songs—“Brought a love, in a cage to your house darlin’ and I let it go...” The song ended up in the play as a song that Timmy Prince writes for Bob. The song isn’t published, as far as I know, and the few lines that have ended up in the play—Bob sings the lines quite intensely at the climax of the show—have to be interpreted with a new melody every time someone new performs the play...which is odd...but the possessive part of me enjoys being one of the few who knows the melody.

So does this make my Halifax friend a muse? Does this make Ron Doug Parks a muse? If we think of a muse as simply inspiration, then yes, they are muses. But if we think of a muse as something greater—like a guiding hand actually writing the material or the fount from which MacIvor must draw to be writer—for example, he wouldn’t have been a writer if he hadn’t met me—then no. We are not muses. MacIvor may not have written *See Bob Run* in exactly the same way had he not met me, but he *would* have written it and he sure as hell would have been a writer—and a great playwright—without my presence. The work would be just as good—and *is* just as good—when I am not a part of it. So in that case I couldn’t be his muse. But would my creative path as an actress have been as interesting without him? Or at all? If the answer is “no,” then that means without MacIvor’s intervention as a writer I wouldn’t have been an actor, or I would have failed as an actor. It’s hard for me to accept this premise. If being a muse means that my agency in the work means nothing, then, I would have to say: “No I am not a muse.”

A good writer can’t help but take from everything around him or her. Sometimes, as a friend, I have felt (like all friends feel with each other at times) as though Daniel’s not hearing something I am saying, but often I will find a reply in one of his plays. It’s as if he is absorbing the thoughts and queries around him and incubating them with his own to try and find an answer

in his work. The people around him—maybe all muses—and the circumstances of his life at the time provide the questions about life that he explores in his plays. For example, one of MacIvor’s main preoccupations (in his plays) is the theme of death and his exploration of this theme was probably reinforced by the fact that many of our friends and colleagues were lost too young. Throughout this thesis I use the word “late” to describe a number of these friends. The idea of death pervades MacIvor’s work and many of his characters are dead as they speak to the audience. I think the question of, “Why are we here?” is intensified as we lose the people around us and for MacIvor it is no different.

Monday, August 8, 7:45pm [1988] - Letter from MacIvor in Toronto to Gillis (?)

There’s a nice breeze blowing through TO these days. It has the slightest hint of autumn and reminds me what a wonderful season that is in the city.

I’ve been to visit Albert a few times. He was discharged today. Oh Albert, he seems so vulnerable now. I have to keep reminding myself how hard it was to be with him to stop myself from throwing my arms around him and saying “I’ll take care of you!” Don’t worry. I won’t.

January 22, 1989 – Letter from MacIvor in Calgary to Gillis in Toronto

[Re: electric typewriter] So this is my new toy. Great eh? I love it. I’ve been doing some very fine revisions to WILD ABANDON on it. Speaking of which. It looks as if it will be postponed a week so that I can go home to Sydney for a week directly from here. My father seemed to think that it was a good idea that I come home soon. So there’s all that to deal with.

I am sitting here in my grey box of a room listening to my new musical find “Ancient Heart” by Tanita Tikaram. Fuck it’s good. I think you’ll like it. [...] So these days with all that is happening my thoughts are much on death. It is all around me now it seems and I don’t see it getting any better due to the state of the world. It’s funny Caroline. I’ve always been Mister-Death-Doesn’t-Scare-Me. But it’s not my death I’m afraid of. It’s everyone else’s’. It just keeps reminding me that I am alive and what the hell am I doing with that aliveness. I guess it’s kind of like what Tom says when he talks about the gentleman caller. He says he is “the long delayed but always expected “something” that we all live for...” I guess I’m trying to figure out what my “something” is. It doesn’t seem to

be love [...] What? Please answer that question and Purolate it to me ASAP. Thanks.

June 6, 1989 - Letter from MacIvor in Sydney to Gillis in Banff

It's strange being here and no Dad. His chair, his spot on the sofa, his stereo, his car and no Dad. I wish I could just hug him for a second. Enough said. (MacIvor)

We were definitely joined at the hip in the early years of our careers. Through our similar sense of humour we developed a language. I believe that every friendship has its own language, and I do think I have a handle on MacIvor's unique language which is something I can bring to his plays. This letter relating a phone call he received seems to be indicative of a kind of seemingly innocuous dialogue that MacIvor can write and infuse with a power and a subtext beyond the simplicity of the words.

June 21, 1991 - Letter from MacIvor in Toronto to Gillis in Stephenville

The phone rang this morning:

HIM: Is Bill there?

ME: Sorry wrong number.

HIM: Is this 944-8332?

ME: Yes.

HIM: This isn't Bill?

ME: No.

HIM: I met this guy on Manline and he told me his name was Bill and he gave me this number.

ME: Sorry, it's not me.

HIM: He sounded just like you.

ME: Sorry no.

HIM: Yes you are Bill.

ME: I'm not Bill.

HIM: Are you sure?

ME: I think so.

HIM: Okay bye.

Ah Toronto. Been doing some rewriting of *Wild Abandon*, going to change the ending and a few other bits. I am glad Ken is directing.
(MacIvor)

Chapter 4 - A Short History of Me and MacIvor: *The Lorca Play*

Walking west on West Queen West (yes West Queen West) in Toronto near Ossington Avenue, just past the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), painted on the side of an old brick building in giant lettering are the words “YOU’VE CHANGED.” It’s a striking piece of artwork, or some might say graffiti, that kind of stops you in your tracks when you first see it, especially if you are a long time denizen of Toronto’s downtown west end and have witnessed the gentrification that has taken place in this neighbourhood over the past ten years. CAMH has been transformed into a modern complex of buildings, and all that’s left of the rather foreboding dark brown stone buildings that used to stand there is a stone fence still tracing the perimeter of some of the property. One of the venues of The Theatre Centre used to sit on the northwest corner of Queen and Brookfield across the street from CAMH. It housed the theatre downstairs and the Royal Canadian Legion upstairs. The building is still standing but now it is awaiting new tenants after housing the “adult” nightclub “Wicked” for many years. Between Ossington and Brookfield on the north side of the street is now a complex of condos and on the ground floor the building dots the sidewalk with high end “trendy” stores and a Starbucks (I’ve done a lot of writing there). Where Starbucks is located used to be the site of the Toronto Transfer Lounge, and in 1992 when we were rehearsing and subsequently performing *The Lorca Play* at The Theatre Centre we spent a lot of time drinking pints there. It was close and it was cheap.

The Lorca Play was a da da kamera and Augusta Company co-production—a collective led by Daniel Brooks as director and Daniel MacIvor as writer and performer (channeling a kind of Lorca figure in the play) along with seven women in a deconstruction of playwright Federico Garcia Lorca’s *The House of Bernarda Alba*. When I think of the eclectic group of women involved in that production, I can’t help but think of the word “muse.” As one of the seven female performers, I worked side by side with actors Maria Vacratsis, the late Tracy Wright, Valerie Buhagiar (actor and filmmaker), Nadia Ross (performer and director, who went on to form Sto Union Theatre), Ali Riley (a country singer and writer, and kind of the coolest woman around town), and Paulette Phillips (a visual artist, writer, filmmaker and teacher at the Ontario College of Art and Design). It was a tumultuous and very fun production to be a part of. Our rehearsals were often interrupted by the outpatients and/or semi-homeless people who dominated

the neighbourhood in 1992, mostly bumming cigarettes from us, or sharing their stream of consciousness speeches. On one occasion a gentleman walked right into rehearsals because he was looking for his cousin, Ruth “who was an actress,” so he figured she might be in there.

The “You’ve Changed” brick wall seems to apply directly to that neighbourhood where “trendy” people didn’t socialize very much back in the day. Now, Ossington Avenue has become such a popular nighttime haunt for the “artsy with money” with its lovely restaurants and funky bars, that a few years back the city council actually put a moratorium on opening a bar or a restaurant on the strip that runs north/south between Queen and Dundas, because the growth was so rapid that the residents were becoming alarmed. But in 1992 the women of *The Lorca Play* had no problem socializing at the rather dodgy Toronto Transfer Lounge after rehearsals and performances, and I guess there was safety in numbers. They had that tough, but kind, kind of wait staff—mostly men—and they eventually accepted the “Lorca women” as a part of their rather rough and tumble clientele, after they realized we drank as much as most of their regulars and even though we were pretty poor, we tipped well. You could still smoke in bars then, so the place smelled of tobacco and ancient beer-soaked carpet. It was loosely divided into two large rooms, and I remember one night an unhappy patron threw an empty pint glass in a perfect arc across the room before it smashed to the floor. We just took our pints and moved to the other room. The Blue Jays won the World Series for the first time that year and in the run up to the win, we would quickly launch ourselves to the Transfer Lounge after the show to watch the games. I still remember all of us standing on our chairs in the bar after the Jays won—just ecstatic and roaring our approval at the top of our lungs with the other regulars. And I also remember a now rather famous and introspective Canadian film director standing on the chair beside me (he had come to our play that night) shouting at the TV screen, “Where’s your God now Jane? Where’s your God now?” in response to Jane Fonda’s (then girlfriend of Ted Turner then owner of losing team Atlanta Braves) gesture of prayer just minutes before the end of the game.

Whether or not we accept “musedom” as a fact, there was certainly a spirit of musedom associated with the seven women in *The Lorca Play* for Brooks and MacIvor, or “the Daniels” as we sometimes called them. As a group we improvised a lot of scenes around themes that seemed to go all over the map—often having no direct relation to Lorca. For example at one point in the

show I told a completely fabricated story about how Woody Allen got together with his then step-daughter, and his now wife, Soon Yi Previn which ended up as part of the production. Woody Allen seems to be a concrete example of someone who provides himself with human female muses for his films on a regular basis—from Mariel Hemingway to Mia Farrow to Scarlett Johansson—and Diane Keaton, his most famous inspiration. The film *Annie Hall* is a stunning example of the melding of the writer, the performer/muse, and the title character. So maybe the tall tale about Woody Allen in *The Lorca Play* wasn't so seemingly unrelated to the themes of the play at all.

Lighting designer Andrea Lundy created dramatic columns of light for certain sections of *The Lorca Play* where the seven actresses strode back and forth in our individual lanes of light. As we strode downstage toward the audience one could feel the power of the group, and just as the bathing suit in *Never Swim Alone* helped me to embrace my body with confidence, so this movement created a powerful (muse-like?) energy of strength and assurance in our collective being. Offstage, as individuals, we were still harbouring our own separate insecurities and anxieties—but as a group onstage there was a feeling that was more akin to the Greek Muses. The columns of light, the rhythmic flamenco steps we performed as a group and the fractured performance of *The House of Bernarda Alba* all contributed to a dynamic reciprocity of musedom in a sense. Were “the Daniels” speaking through us as the directors/writers (with the final word on the piece), or were we, as performers, speaking through “the Daniels” to bring the collective creation to the stage? Or was Lorca the “muse” for us all, speaking through his words from *The House Bernarda Alba*? This production provided a different dynamic in the supposed “playwright and his muse” relationship between me and MacIvor. In this way, as a performer and a contributor to the piece, in a sense I was writing back to the playwright who normally wrote for me. This is when I begin to see the definition of “muse” transforming into a definition that includes a moving force—and this is why it becomes a complex term to define. There are layers and reciprocal energies involved in the creation of a theatrical piece and the power between the different entities shifts constantly during that creation—until you reach (hopefully) a cohesive whole.

So when I left the Starbucks at Queen and Ossington after an unproductive morning of writing and looked up at the words on the wall that I had seen before—“You’ve Changed”—

somehow they had new life. The duality of “change” can be a good thing or a bad thing, depending on your perspective, and certainly the gentrification of (often poor) neighbourhoods can be a hotly contested topic, but now I was seeing it as akin to the idea of a muse and the myriad of forms this word or “state of being” can take on. The Starbucks sits on the same land that held the Toronto Transfer Lounge. Now I was drinking a latte instead of a beer, and no one was lobbing empty pint glasses across the room—although the place does play host to some of the lost souls and outpatients who still inhabit the changing area. Change is inevitable for all, and I’m no exception.

Arlene Croce explores the concept of a muse in her 1996 *New Yorker Magazine* article “Is the Muse Dead?” And she seems to pinpoint the death in 1987 (which is interestingly the year *See Bob Run* reached fruition). Croce cites American realist painter Andrew Wyeth’s series of paintings on the subject “Helga” as the “last large-scale manifestation of the Muse in our culture, and Muses are not wanted anymore” (164). Helga wasn’t Wyeth’s wife—his wife was actually his agent. “Helga” looked like what the public imagined a muse would look like: “Helga had Nordic cheekbones and an impassive Nordic manner, she intersected nicely with Jessica Lange and other female idols of the movies and TV, and at the same time corrected them: she was plainer, sturdier, someone with values” (Croce 164). Croce describes the muse further in this way: “Muses are born, not made, and that’s part of the reason they are disappearing. Some are born with talent, some not, but all Muses must possess two qualities, beauty and mystery, and of the two mystery is the greater. Somehow or other, the woman must be able to impel the artist toward the goal of creation; she must be good for the art” (164).

Now, this is where my already confused thoughts about the muse get even more entangled in my personal case study. Somewhere inside me, and especially in my twenties, when I was nursing the insecurities that those years bring, I dreamt of being beautiful and mysterious—so maybe I secretly liked it when people offhandedly referred to me as “MacIvor’s muse.” I might not have held that sway over the straight men I desired, but if people got a whiff of “beautiful and mysterious” when they heard my name in conjunction with a theatre production, I don’t think I was averse to that. And if people think I hold inspiration for a great writer, then who am I to argue? Unfortunately, where the fantasy falls down is if one believes that my career as an actress would be nowhere without MacIvor. That’s when the idea of a muse

subsumes the craft of the actor under the auspices of someone else's talent. Then the role of "muse" is detrimental to the actor's own work. I would like to think that my own work as an actress and a theatre artist stands on its own—outside of MacIvor's plays—but perhaps this thesis belies that idea. When two artists are closely linked together it is almost inevitable that both or one or the other will pull away at a certain time and in my case I can see two reasons for that. First, one cannot survive economically on MacIvor plays alone, so as an actor I have always had to seek work elsewhere. And second, I need to establish autonomy as an actor and theatre artist in my own right. This also releases the writer and friend I have in MacIvor to create roles for female actors other than myself. However, a connection has remained during the pursuit of our own individual careers, and I keep coming back to the fact that the connection is friendship. And friendships can't help but change with age and time as well.

As MacIvor and I changed, so did the characters in his plays reflect those changes—even though Bob had killed someone, she had an innocence about her and a sense of humour, which endeared her to the audience. In *Never Swim Alone* the Referee/lifeguard's innocence was taken along with her life in drowning as a young girl, and in her reincarnation as the lifeguard she possesses more power and savvy and wields it over the men who look to her as a judge in their never-ending one-upmanship of competition. Certainly these changes were taking place in MacIvor and also in me as we slowly started to gain confidence and experience in our field. By the time I performed the role of Agnes in *Marion Bridge*—a part that I did not premiere, but which was written with me in mind—cynicism was creeping into my characters, but not without humour. Never without humour. As the failed actress and recovering alcoholic we could see in Agnes the edges peeling away from the innocence of her youth. It's kind of like suddenly seeing your apartment anew after 12 years and realizing that the paint is cracking and peeling, and how did that happen...and I'm supposed to be a painter (walls not canvasses) and how did I end up in this position—but now I'm not talking about Agnes anymore. So, definitely some spillover between life and art.

By the time I was playing Kath in *Was Spring* in 2012 at the Tarragon Theatre's Extra Space at the age of 50, I was playing a character in full-blown anger mode. Kath was a recovering alcoholic, but recovering her sobriety doesn't alleviate her anger. This was also the case with the character of Leda in *Communion* who also quit the booze, and sought help for her

anger and fear (she also had cancer) from a therapist. Leda loses a daughter to religion, and Kath loses a daughter to addiction. These themes of addiction and recovery were starting to permeate MacIvor's plays—as well as a continuing preoccupation with death and dying.

As an actress premiering in many of MacIvor's plays I have seen him progress as a director as well as a writer. He directed me in my own one-woman play *Caveman Rainbow* in 1992 and I remember on the first day of rehearsal I sat on the stage in the Theatre Passe Muraille Backspace where I would perform the play as part of a festival called "The Gathering," and in this new incarnation of our working relationship, I looked up at him in the audience and said in my most plaintive "just fell off the turnip truck" accent: "D'rect me. D'rect me!" It was an awkward shift in our relationship and as usual we dealt with it by deflecting with humour. I also remember that during a note session at the Epicure Café we had mussels and one of the mussel shells transformed into a character called Calvin Clam who figured prominently in our rehearsals for that show. Calvin Clam could say things that MacIvor couldn't—and Calvin was crude and very funny. In my opening night card for *Caveman Rainbow* from Daniel and Calvin he shared their argument over what I might wear that night. "Daniel suggested something alluring and tasteful with a knowing innocence... Calvin said 'yeah, just like a homosexual.' Daniel said 'please Calvin don't be cruel' and Calvin said 'eat me' and they began once again their tedious bickering" (MacIvor, Card).

Later that year MacIvor did his first full-fledged gig as a director for his play *Jump*. It was a non-speaking production set to music with a large cast and no words save for one at the end of the play. I was a bride, Ken McDougall was the groom, Judith Orban was my Mom, Tracy Wright and Nadia Ross played my twin daughters and Ed Roy was the host for the silent ceremony that ensued. In the end Wright's character climbs a ladder until she is out of sight to the audience and Ross's character looks up and whispers "Jump." It was a fitting title for MacIvor's first endeavor into the world of direction, and not everyone in that position would be brave enough to cast two of their former directors in the play. As a director MacIvor has become assured and confident. He knows what he wants to see on the stage now, in the same way he knows how he wants his words to be on the page. He is very precise and if something is not working, even a tiny moment in a scene, he will take the time needed to fix it or find the answer. If he doesn't find it that day, it will stay on the edges of his thoughts and he will usually come

back the next day with a solution. The precise nature of what he demands from the actor on stage ends up looking like the most natural thing in the world when it is delivered. It is a kind of precise and deceptively casual kind of performance. When he sees you do something in rehearsal that he likes, he wants to lock it down as a choice, which can sometimes be difficult when an actor wants to explore. In rehearsals for the Company Theatre production of *Marion Bridge* MacIvor said to the cast as a group—not unkindly—“I don’t give a sweet flying fuck what’s going on in your head—as long as the audience feels something—I don’t need to know what you’re feeling.” I have to stress that this was part of a very funny exchange and the audacity of the statement prompted a lot of laughter. Calvin Clam would be proud.

As a performer who participated in the first production that MacIvor directed (and many productions since) I am aware of how he works. My experience provides a short cut to our communications in rehearsals. I am able to assimilate his direction more efficiently, and I can adapt to last minute changes in dialogue, and frank directorial notes in a way that, perhaps, another actor might find more difficult. As my director MacIvor wields more power over my choices as an actor. This might present evidence that I do possess the qualities of a human muse in the sense that I can be molded more easily in our relationship as an actor and a director.

When Daniel knows what he doesn’t want (as a director) he makes the decision swiftly and emphatically (in the same way I watched him pitch a play in the garbage) which can be frustrating for other members of the production, especially costume designers. I remember one example of this was when we were rehearsing *Communion* at Tarragon Theatre in 2010. The character, Leda, has cancer. Her hair is growing back after chemotherapy and in the first scene of the play, she is wearing a tam to hide her baldness. In the second scene we find her in a hotel room wearing a wig as she waits to meet with her estranged daughter. The wig prompts her daughter to say “Your hair’s different” and Leda just brushes the comment off. The intent was that after an exhausting meeting with her daughter, which ends with her daughter leaving—Leda slumps down on the bed and pulls off the wig to reveal her very short hair. I went with designer Shawn Kerwin, and the head of wardrobe at Tarragon, to a shop to try on wigs—MacIvor had to stay in rehearsal. We spent a lot of time trying on the different hairpieces and we had to surreptitiously take photos of our final three choices (you’re not allowed to take pictures of the wigs for some reason) and we sent the pictures to MacIvor. You can’t return a wig.

Understandable. He picked one and we paid for the expensive wardrobe piece and headed back to the rehearsal hall. We arrived, I donned the wig and we started the scene—and after about 45 seconds MacIvor stopped everything and said, “No, no, I hate the wig. I don’t want you to wear a wig at all—I just want you to have the short hair.” The wig was instantly discarded. It lived on the props table for the next couple of weeks, never to be used except as a gag when on occasion MacIvor would don the wig to deliver his notes or to demonstrate blocking that an actor (usually me) couldn’t get right. In a play about cancer, alcoholism, estrangement and death, the laughs delivered by that wig were a welcome distraction.

In MacIvor’s two-woman play *A Beautiful View* I went shopping with Sherrie Johnson (Daniel’s producing partner in da da kamera) to find a shirt for my character Mitch to wear. We found a dark brown cotton blouse with long sleeves with a kind of retro western feel, and instead of buttons down the front, the blouse was kept closed by one single long lace crisscrossing through the eyelets. MacIvor hated it. He joked about it. He kept pulling at the lace. His direction during rehearsals kept coming back to “that shirt, I don’t know...that shirt.” After a couple of days of his quiet obsession with the laced up shirt, we were rehearsing a seduction scene between my character Mitch and Tracy Wright’s character Liz. He came on stage—he likes to come on stage to demonstrate—and he started pulling at the lace. The scene involved Tracy and me slowly moving in a circle to a very slow and sexy cover of Madonna’s “Crazy for You” without actually touching. MacIvor started to circle with me, he untied the lace at the top, then he reached down and pulled at the lace from the bottom of the shirt and the lace gave way and came sliding out from the eyelets, leaving the shirt open, and then he tossed the lace on the floor. It became a brilliant part of the seduction scene and Tracy rendered the movement beautifully. And suddenly the shirt that obsessed him made sense. MacIvor hates having anything on stage that doesn’t have a purpose and the lace in that shirt looked like an unused prop to him. The seduction scene is quickly followed by an uncomfortable Mitch putting her shirt back on and delivering a monologue to the audience in a half-light about sneaking away guiltily after her one-night stand with a woman. I am never adept at choreography, and trying to put the lace back into the eyelets of a shirt while speaking to an audience nervously, on a basically dark stage, was pretty tricky at first—but the fear of not getting my shirt back on properly for the next scene gave the speech an undercurrent of true anxiety that brought the scene to a whole new level. A part of

me thinks that MacIvor took a secret pleasure in my anxiety over getting the shirt laced up correctly—a kind of punishment for choosing it in the first place.

There's a certain punishment and reward inherent in the artist/muse pairing which in some ways can correlate with a marriage. In *Jump* MacIvor was examining the ceremony of marriage, and the ups and downs that follow the bride and her soon-to-be husband during the ceremony in *Jump*, mirror the journey of a marriage destined for doom. I am not MacIvor's wife but maybe there was the air of an ersatz marriage about our relationship at certain times. This spurred my interest in looking at some male playwrights and their actress wives. Does the intersection of their personal and professional lives provide any proof to support the concept of a playwright's muse?

Chapter 5 - Anton Chekhov and Olga Knipper

I decided to search for evidence of a muse in actress Olga Knipper for playwright Anton Chekhov. Their relationship is not precisely synonymous with my relationship with MacIvor, but Knipper and Chekhov had a working and personal relationship so it seemed like a good place to start my search in an effort to find comparison. I am unconvinced that I found that muse in Olga Knipper who was an integral member of the Moscow Arts Theatre from its inception in 1898 through to her last appearance in *The Cherry Orchard* for the jubilee season of 1948-49. But I did find myself noting similarities between myself and Knipper as actresses, as well as picking up on some likenesses between Chekhov and MacIvor as playwrights, and I think the comparisons might shed some light on the elusive nature of motivation as well as the working lives of theatre artists.

When Olga Knipper was 80 she was attending a gala evening, as a member of the audience at the Moscow Arts Theatre, and in a climactic moment of Chekhov's *The Three Sisters* she spoke the character Masha's lines aloud from her seat before the actress on stage could do so (Benedetti ix). Knipper was famous for her role as Masha, and her connection with Chekhov and his words must excuse her from the possession of a few moments of the play and the part that she had originally created on the stage. However, as possessive as I have felt about some of my MacIvor roles, I hope that as a dotty old lady, I won't find myself calling out the lines from *See Bob Run* or *Marion Bridge* at some event feting MacIvor's work as a playwright. The audience hears my voice from the crowd at the end of Bob's first monologue, "The queen wasn't pregnant at all. She was just full of shit," or as Agnes in *Marion Bridge* sarcastically answering her sister (and nun) Theresa's question about whether or not she's drunk with, "So yes maybe I am drunk. But I think 'drunk' is supposed to be a lot more fun than this isn't it?" I guess if the drinks are free it could happen.

Knipper certainly became famous for interpreting Chekhov's roles, and, indeed he did write the part of Masha specifically for her—and by all accounts it was her most masterful performance of his work—but it's still difficult to imagine that someone who was by the author's side for such a short period of time could provide the role of a muse. In Donald Rayfield's biography *Anton Chekhov: A Life* and Harvey Pitcher's *Chekhov's Leading Lady* it is established that different people have different takes on Knipper's role in Chekhov's life. Either she was a

conniving and selfish actress looking to link herself with a famous writer, or this was a story of true love at first sight. The truth, of course, lies somewhere in between. It seems there can be a case made for Knipper cementing her role as Chekhov's only "leading lady" and muse after his death—although she never used the word muse. But one cannot take away the fact that Knipper was an actress and a devoted one at that, before meeting Chekhov, and as a female pioneer in the arts kept working even after she married.

When Anton met Olga he was nearly forty years old and the combined duration of their friendship, love affair and marriage spanned less than six years, from their meeting in 1898 (Olga had just turned 30), to their marriage in 1901 and to Anton's eventual death in 1904. Certainly the attraction was immediate between the two when they met at rehearsals for *The Seagull* in production for the Moscow Arts Theatre's first season. Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko was a writer and director who came up with the idea for a new kind of theatre which he founded with Konstantin Stanislavsky—that being the Moscow Arts Theatre. The two wanted an alternative to the more stuffy and traditional fare seen in Petersburg. Although *The Seagull* had failed miserably in Petersburg, causing great pain to its playwright and making him question why he wrote for the theatre at all, Nemirovich courted Chekhov for the right to stage the play again. After initially being rebuffed Nemirovich prevailed and the production at the new theatre was a success (Rayfield 461). Although Chekhov attended rehearsals for *The Seagull* in which Knipper played Arkadina, it was her performance in Aleksei Tolstoy's *Tsar Fiodor* that sparked his interest and he thought her portrayal of Irina was splendid. Chekhov wrote: "The voice, the nobility, the depth of feeling is so good that I have a lump in my throat...If I had stayed in Moscow I should have fallen in love with this Irina" (461-462).

Daniel recalled his initial thoughts about meeting me in Halifax in an interview with Richard Ouzounian in 2010: "My first play was called *Blue Bells* and we booked one of the classroom studios to rehearse and perform it [...] In the class a year ahead of me there was this odd, kind of wild, kind of weird kind of girl who was actually from my hometown and whom I suspected might have been originally from the same planet as me. I asked her to be the stage manager and she agreed – probably because she thought there'd be a party" (Ouzounian, *Toronto Star*). So no real correlation there but in Knipper's following letter to Anton I can certainly see shades of my younger self:

December 8, 1901 (Night) - Letter from Knipper in Moscow to Chekhov in Yalta

I'm quite drunk, Anton! Forgive your dissolute wife! After the show we gathered in the director's office and had a party. We had pies, caviar, salmon, fruit, wine, champagne and chatter. I laughed a lot. We drank to your health, my darling! It was all very cramped but enjoyable. (Benedetti 191)

Like Olga, I did enjoy the party, (now I prefer the television) but there is a case to be made that in some ways the social aspect of the theatrical world is a part of the process. And Olga was a hard-working young woman living an alternative lifestyle, so perhaps her "dissolute" nature is understandable.

Chekhov seemed destined to be a bachelor when he met Knipper, but he certainly wasn't short on women wanting to change that status throughout his life. Women seemed to find him attractive even before he became a famous writer. I would even go so far as to call him a "lady's man." His rationale for not marrying until late in his short life probably consisted of a complex of reasons. Anton had a brutal upbringing under the hands of his father which no doubt damaged his trust in others. He had a restless nature and when he was in one place he always seemed to be pining for another. Anton's battle with tuberculosis and his failing health was probably also a factor in his bachelorhood, and as well as an adult he had taken on the role of head of the Chekhov household, providing financially for his parents and his siblings. It's not surprising that these factors made him run hot and cold toward the women in his life, and many of Anton's inamoratas remained on the fringes of his family's world for the entirety of his life. In 1886 Anton was engaged for a short time to Dunia Efros, but the engagement was cloaked in secretiveness which incidentally foreshadows his highly secretive marriage ceremony to Knipper years later. "Dunia's violent spirit attracted and repelled Anton and would infiltrate the highly sexed and assertive heroines of his stories that year" (Rayfield 124). Anton also had a relationship with Olga Kundasova who worked at the Moscow observatory and was friends with his sister, Masha. The relationship came and went for almost two decades (92). This seemed to be the pattern for most of Chekhov's relationships. "Both Olga Kundasova and Dunia Efros experienced much distress before finding their places on the periphery on Anton's life" (93). There were others, including another hush, hush liaison with a homely actress, Kleopatra Karatygina who was a widow and older than Anton. She played Death in *Don Juan* for the Maly

Theatre in Petersburg. Their bond seemed to spring from her understanding of Anton's unhappiness (200-201). But one of his most significant relationships seemed to be with Lika Mizinova who, if a muse ever existed for Chekhov, would be a likely candidate for that role. Their on again off again love affair/friendship seemed to hang on throughout break-ups, recriminations—and even through Lika's affair with Chekhov's married friend, poet Ignati Potapenko. Lika even bore an illegitimate child from her affair with Potapenko, but the child, Christina, died just after reaching her second birthday. Lika spent her life trying to find somewhere to fit, as Chekhov's lover, as a mistress, as a mother, as an opera singer and a would-be actress. It was a heartbreaking life coursing with the undercurrent of an unrequited love for Chekhov. Rayfield writes of Lika after Chekhov's death: "At the apartment, Lika Mizinova joined the family. She stood in black, silently staring through the window for two hours" (599).

My suspicion is that many women harboured dreams of being Chekhov's "muse"—the writer of the late 19th century was the rock star of his time—and certainly many women who hung around the edges of his life did provide, at least, inspiration for his characters, but the realisation of these characters in his writing was not always flattering.

Olga Knipper was famous enough to actively keep the legend of her union with Chekhov alive even after his death. She was only 36 years old when he died, but she never married again. They spent much of their married life apart and tried to fill the distance with letters—some of which are chronicled in Jean Benedetti's *Dear Writer Dear Actress*. Even after Anton died she continued to write to him for some time. "I live my life as though you were coming to me once more, looking at me with your wonderful, shining eyes, stroking me, calling me your doggie...My darling, where are you?" (Benedetti 290). There was a genuine love and affection between Chekhov and Knipper, but it seems quite likely that Knipper, in a sense, married the *playwright* rather than the *man*. If Chekhov hadn't been dying when he met Knipper, I'm not sure he would have married her—his restless nature and his previous history with women point to that possibility. But as a physician Chekhov would have known how serious his illness was becoming, and how short his life would be, and this could have played a part in his decision to finally take the plunge into marriage.

When *The Seagull* opened on December 17, 1898 the theatre was packed and Knipper won praise for her role of Arkadina (Rayfield 479). "Nemirovich [...] told Anton: 'She is so

involved in her part that you can't tell her apart from [Arkadina's] elegant actress's get-up and vulgar charm, meanness and jealousy" (479). In 1899 Knipper and Chekhov moved from friends to lovers and "just as Nemirovich [...] wanted a monopoly of Anton's plays so Olga was seeking a monopoly of Anton's love life" (498). In Russia the leading actress of a theatre (at that time) was often mistress to the director and Rayfield indicates that this was the case with Knipper and the married Nemirovich, and that union continued even after it seemed clear that Knipper was engaged to Chekhov (500). In 1900 Nemirovich told Stanislavsky that "the business" of Olga's marriage to Anton was a done deal (514). "As he worked on *Three Sisters*, Chekhov was unwittingly writing his marriage contract to both a theatre and an actress" (514). There's a calculation in these personal and professional pursuits on the part of Knipper and Nemirovich. The two were devoted to the Moscow Arts Theatre and put it above all else. However, Anton was an open and willing participant in the pursuit.

Knipper eventually closed down all comers for Anton's affections after gathering the information she needed by befriending his sister, Masha, as well as his exes including Lika Mizinova and Olga Kundasova. After securing her place with Anton she began a subtle sabotage of his past lovers in her letters to him. Of a visit from Kundasova Knipper said: "She was so elegant, sheer charm. But you know, it was painful to look at her—she has been so knocked about by life she needs peace and affection so badly" (Rayfield 498). After she was secured in marriage to Anton, Olga set her sights on Lika Mizinova as another former lover to be dealt with in a cruel and manipulative set-up. Lika read for the role of Elena in *Uncle Vanya*—a role that Olga had played—and Olga was present for her audition. The knives came out when Knipper wrote to Anton: "Lika Mizinova tried to imitate me, a dirty trick, but everything she read was complete rubbish...and I was sorry for her, frankly. We rejected her unanimously. Sanin [a director whom Lika later married] suggested she open a hat shop [...] Perhaps she can have a non-speaking part" (Rayfield 545). It's clear in this trap, who was actually committing the dirty trick.

Rayfield paints a ruthless and ambitious picture of Knipper at times—a selfish woman who didn't want to give up her career for her man. He goes so far as to suggest that the baby Olga miscarried during her marriage to Anton was not his baby. The surgery Olga underwent at the time of the miscarriage indicated that it was an ectopic pregnancy, and as a physician Anton

would have been aware that an ectopic pregnancy happens between eight and ten weeks after conception which would mean that Olga became pregnant when she and Anton had been in different towns (557). Olga never gave up the social whirl of her life after her marriage. Anton's health required him to stay in the warmer climes of Yalta on the Crimean peninsula during the winter—while Olga had to work in Moscow on the theatre's season during those months. When Chekhov did spend rare times in Moscow with Olga, she carried on with her social life as usual. Chekhov's friend, writer Ivan Bunin, describes in a letter an evening he witnessed where Olga gets dressed up in furs and goes out to spend an evening with Nemirovich, and she flaunts it in front of Anton who is too ill to go out. Olga doesn't return until 4am where she finds Anton waiting up for her, whereupon she gently reprimands him for this (Rayfield 585). It was a heartbreaking scenario for Chekhov—worthy of one of his plays—or maybe the basis of Kenny Rogers and the First Edition's 1969 hit, "O Ruby Don't Take Your Love to Town."

If Olga was a muse to Anton she was clearly a very human muse who came with all the trappings of moral ambiguity which that entails. The fact that Olga was never fully "domesticated" as a traditional wife may have helped her to keep a position of higher status in Chekhov's eyes. Olga may not have been a muse, but her independent nature and lively spirit would definitely have provided inspiration for Chekhov. And my suspicion is that Olga's forthright personality was something Anton admired.

In searching for a playwright's muse, one uncovers the fact that almost everyone and everything is a muse. Although Chekhov was inspired by Knipper and wrote roles for her in *The Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard* she is hardly alone as a source of inspiration. Lika Mizinova clearly provided the inspiration for the thwarted young actress, Nina in *The Seagull* who is impregnated and tossed aside by the character of the writer Trigorin. In a dark twist of art being prescient about life, Nina later loses the baby—a gloomy foreshadowing of the death of Lika's child (404). Dunia Efros seems to provide impetus for the Jewish wife of the cold and distant Ivanov in the play of the same name. As well as tortured affairs with women (not to mention romps with actresses and visits to brothels), Anton also draws on his family for inspiration. His father Pavel was cruel and ruled his young children with his fist, while constantly pontificating on his Russian Orthodox Christianity. Chekhov's friend Potapenko relates in a letter: "He [Pavel] had cast a pall on his [Anton's] childhood and aroused in his soul

a protest against the despotic imposition of belief” (qtd. in Rayfield 297). Religion is always a fertile ground for a playwright—and this is also true of MacIvor with his devout Roman Catholic upbringing—and religion can’t help but provide inspiration for Chekhov’s work. As Cape Breton Island affects and influences Daniel’s (and my own) sense of place in this world, so do the changing venues of Chekhov’s life inform his writing. From his poverty stricken childhood in Taganrog, to his life with his sister and parents in Melikhova, to his final years in Yalta, location no doubt also served as a kind of muse. In 1890 Chekhov travelled to the remote island of Sakhalin where he must have been affected by the plight of the prisoners he met there in the penal colony. It would have been a life changing trip. Location, religion, and family were as equally influential motivators for the playwright, as the women in his life—or as possible “muses” for his work.

There’s a restless nature in Chekhov that is also present in MacIvor. MacIvor toured a lot, especially with da da kamera and his one-man shows, but I never got the sense that he actually liked travelling. “Travelling is wonderful as awful as it is. Saw a couple on the plane right out of *Jump*. She was still in her ‘wedding dress’—he in his tuxedo. I felt both moved and pitiful” (MacIvor, Letter 1993). MacIvor bought a house in the country and moved back to Nova Scotia in 2011, but still travels where his work takes him. When he is in Nova Scotia, he seems to pine for Toronto and vice versa. MacIvor’s youth, though not physically brutal like Chekhov’s, was still fraught with the difficulties brought about by an alcoholic parent, and certainly his volatile relationship with the Catholic religion (especially as a gay man) has fueled his plays with a rage, as well as a cutting sense of humour. Chekhov also seemed to be impatient with his surroundings: in Yalta he pined for Moscow (a famous theme of Chekhov’s!), and when he was with his family in Melikhova he would often abruptly escape to Petersburg to visit his friend and publisher, Aleksei Suvorin.

Anton’s treatment of his sister Masha is interesting and one might make a case that he became the muse for *her* life—especially after he died. She opened a Chekhov museum in his Yalta home which still exists today. She managed to save the house throughout much strife and political upheaval in Russia, surviving even the Stalin era, and keeping the house and future museum intact, carefully preserving Chekhov’s study as well as his writings. She was a devoted, but often frustrated sister. It seemed she was, in many ways, Anton’s personal assistant and

secretary. Masha did a lot of the leg work in their lives, holding down the fort when Anton took off on his travels to cavort with Suvorin in Petersburg, or to make his pilgrimage to Sakhalin Island. Anton told Suvorin that Masha was one of those “rare and incomprehensible women” who had no interest in marriage. It was Anton who discouraged any offers of marriage and sent Masha’s suitors away, or Masha herself would put an end to a relationship with any sign of disapproval from Anton (Rayfield 267). Eventually Masha resigned herself to her role as keeper of her brother’s archives. Chekhov was meticulous about filing his letters, writing, and correspondence, and Masha assisted him in this task, which led to her being the ultimate guardian of his career and reputation after his death.

Masha and Olga struck up a great friendship. It was only after Knipper actually married Anton that a rift grew between the two women—the power shifted—and as much as Olga defends herself in her letters to Anton, which are filled with anxiety and paranoia regarding Masha and Anton’s mother Evgenia, it’s hard not to believe that she orchestrated herself quite handily into her position as the first lady of Anton’s life.

April 18, 1901 - Letter from Knipper in Moscow to Chekhov in Yalta

It’s 2 in the morning and I’m writing to you again, dearest Anton! I can’t get you out of my head, I think of you every moment. I suddenly have the feeling that you’re already tired of me, that you don’t love me as you used to, that you just like having me around, and see me as someone near you and nothing more [...] Don’t be angry with me [...] Mother asked me, oh so discreetly, whether I would be living with you or would make other arrangements. We haven’t decided anything and I just don’t know what to tell mother. (Benedetti 123-24)

April 22, 1901 - Letter from Chekhov in Yalta to Knipper in Moscow

My dear sweet Knipschitz, I didn’t ask you to stay on because I thought that, in any case, we would soon be seeing each other wherever we liked. Dear heart, you are getting worked up over nothing [...] I shall be in Moscow at the beginning of May. If possible, we will get married and take a trip on the Volga or we will take a trip on the Ga and then get married, whichever you prefer. (Benedetti 126)

The friendship between Masha and Olga was never the same after Anton married Olga secretly, without inviting anyone to the ceremony including Masha and his mother, Evgenia. It must have been a devastating blow to the two, but with Anton as their provider, their hands were tied. It was beyond cruel to marry so quickly and with a kind of privacy about the ceremony that verged on neurotic—Olga complied but it was definitely Anton’s idea to marry without letting anyone know until after the fact.

May 18, 1988 – Letter from MacIvor in Banff to Gillis in Toronto

Caroline don’t be anxious. Life is too short and wonderful to waste time worrying. Time for a little Wild Abandon in your life I think. Let it happen inside. Realize how fucking special you are and how much you have to offer and then sing and dance your way through every day. It won’t work all the time but if that’s what you’re shooting for it’s bound to happen more often than not. (MacIvor)

I can only surmise that this letter was in response to my insecurities and frustrations as an actress—and I suspect that the conflict that I had between being an actress and having a normal life was also part of the woe that MacIvor is trying to assuage in his response. As an actress and a woman I can empathize with Olga Knipper—even if she had streaks of selfishness and ambition (and I can’t say I don’t empathize with those feelings either) choosing a career as an actor is not an easy choice, and choosing a career as an actress for Olga Knipper was downright courageous for her time. The members of the Moscow Art Theatre would put the work ethic of most of us contemporary theatre artists to shame. The members of the Moscow Arts Theatre truly devoted their lives to the theatre and immersed themselves in the endeavor full-time. When Olga met Anton she had a career and was well-respected among her peers. If a “muse” is something to be molded, then I don’t think Olga was a muse. She was forging and creating her own reality as a working actress, and I suspect this was part of the attraction for Anton. As a woman she is judged more harshly for her choices, and even though her affair with Nemirovich might raise our eyebrows, certainly a double standard applies to her as a woman, because when we read of famous male artists’ affairs it is viewed as a fairly routine and unsurprising practice. Olga is also clearly conflicted about spending more time on her career than on her marriage. Distance can exacerbate those doubts and Olga expresses them in a December 23, 1901 letter to Anton: “I expect in your heart you reproach me with not loving you enough? Is that right? You reproach me with not giving up the theatre—and of not being a real wife to you! I can imagine

what your mother thinks! And she's right, she's right! Anton, dearest, forgive me, I'm a frivolous fool but don't think badly of me" (Benedetti 260).

At times I feel frustrated with my life and this "entity" of theatre. It's hard to be angry at an entity—where does one aim their frustration? Knipper has to be respected for giving up a "normal" life to be an actress, and like Masha she survived the tumultuous times that Russia's political unrest brought—and she adapted. Knipper may not have been Chekhov's muse but she clearly was a brilliant interpreter of his work, and through her portrayal of those characters she was channeling both her love for the man and her love for the art.

Chapter 6 - Bertolt Brecht and Helene Weigel... and Ruth Berlau

“I want to write, and also to direct plays. That is my field of activity, my profession. It is what I can do!” (Bunge 219). Ruth Berlau, long-time mistress and collaborator of playwright Bertolt Brecht, wrote this line in a letter to a publisher in 1951—and it’s included in her fascinating memoir: *Living for Brecht: The Memoirs of Ruth Berlau* which was edited and assembled by Hans Bunge, a member of the Berliner Ensemble and friend to Berlau. My initial interest was to explore the relationship between Brecht and his wife, actress Helene Weigel, in this search for the muse, but I was struck by Berlau’s life, and when it became clear that Brecht drew inspiration (and succour) from many different women I had to look beyond just his relationship with Weigel. Of the many women Brecht bedded and worked with, Berlau comes closest to filling the role of a traditional “muse” for the playwright—and she actively pursued that role with a fervor. As a human muse, Berlau offered herself up to Brecht willingly, to be molded by his charismatic personality, sacrificing her life for his work—and his love.

The women Brecht surrounded himself with were intelligent, talented and energetic in their own right, but they verged on being exploited by Brecht. There was something about the rather shy and eccentric playwright that seemed to be a magnet for these especially talented women to open themselves up to him for consumption. Berlau is a strong example of someone whose own career was subsumed by that of her mentor, Brecht. He surrounded himself with female collaborators who catered to his every need. In a sense he created for himself a chorus of female Muses. My focus is on Berlau, but by touching on Weigel as well as Brecht’s collaborators Elisabeth Hauptmann and Margarete Steffin, I hope to prove that the idea of a muse for Brecht in a human form was vital to his work as a playwright. He was the figurehead who took the main credit as writer, but Hauptmann, Steffin and Berlau did a lot of the leg work. This isn’t to say that Brecht wasn’t a brilliant writer in his own right; however even though these women were given credit on some of his works, the first name we think of is always Brecht’s. The love that Brecht’s female collaborators bore for him made them accept their secondary credit as creators, living in the shadow of his sphere. Brecht provides evidence which indicates that the title of “muse” is detrimental to the female who bears its name.

If Chekhov was a “lady’s man” then Brecht was a downright “hound dog” with his womanizing ways—but it always started and ended with the work. Brecht was driven and Berlau

describes his disdain for idle chat in her memoirs: “Brecht shunned parties at which people merely chatted, for there was no underlying theme [...] If one told him about something that had happened somewhere, or described something one had seen, he would be silent for a while, then say, ‘And what of it?’ He was waiting for the conclusion, the practical application” (Bunge 122). Brecht and Weigel lived in exile for fifteen years after fleeing Nazi Germany in 1933. They found themselves in Denmark where they met the twenty year old Berlau. Berlau remembers the meeting: “We Danes are renowned for our friendliness and hospitality, but the cordiality with which Helene Weigel greeted us was unusual even by our standards. With her tremendous personality she exuded an air of sovereignty that impressed us, but at first also slightly intimidated us” (Bunge 22). The next day Brecht took the very beautiful young Berleau to his room and read to her from his “Ballad of the Reichstag Fire.” They laughed a lot and he sang to her from *Threepenny Opera* (30). Berlau adds: “While he was singing, Helene Weigel came in and gave me a black look. My conscience being clear, I did not understand the reproach behind it. Years later I understood it only too well. Helene was of course familiar with Brecht’s ways, and she knew this was how his affairs always started” (30).

Margarete Steffin came into Brecht’s life in 1937, first as a secretary, but later he would name her as a collaborator on many of his plays. He apparently liked that Steffin was a true proletarian (Bunge 76). As Berlau notes: “She was a relentless critic. She wanted to ensure that even the workers would understand Brecht’s poetry” (Bunge 76-77). Steffin has received some credit for her collaborations with Brecht which included her work on *The Life of Galileo*. New collaborators often entered Brecht’s circle much to the chagrin of the ones who came before. When Brecht married Helene Weigel in 1929 he told one of his paramours, Carola Neher (an actress who played Polly Peachum in *Threepenny Opera*) that it “couldn’t be avoided and didn’t mean anything” (Hayman 140). As Ronald Hayman recounts in *Brecht: A Biography*, Neher used the flowers he presented, along with the news of his marriage, as a weapon, but Elisabeth Hauptmann went even further when she heard the news and tried to kill herself (140). Bunge describes Hauptmann: “She was involved in practically all his productions between 1923 and 1933. Brecht named her as collaborator in nine of his eleven plays. Clearly she succeeded best of all in adapting herself to Brecht’s methods of working—or encountered the least difficulties. The problems besetting his male collaborators—how best to get on with a man who always assumed the dominating role—did not exist for her [...] The relationship with his female collaborators

was basically different for as long as Brecht remained loyal to them. They invariably formed a symbiosis with him” (Bunge 256).

Helene Weigel had to endure countless humiliations as Brecht’s wife, often taking a back seat to his female writing collaborators—as an artist in her own right, and as a sexual partner. Brecht had already been married to Marianne Hoff, an opera singer, with whom he had a child—and in comparison Weigel was very stable and extremely devoted to him. She was willing to let her own work take a back seat to Brecht’s during their exile. Weigel said that she didn’t even think about her own career as an actress, because the important practical concerns were to raise their two children and make it possible for Brecht to work (Hayman 140). Hayman relates an incident where Brecht got into a shouting match with German writer Ernest Bornemann, after Bornemann made a comparison between an excerpt of Brecht’s and an excerpt from one of Hemingway’s works. Bornemann related: “Brecht shouted: ‘Get out, get out, get out’[...] The shouting brought Weigel ‘out of the kitchen, a frying pan in her hand; and without having the vaguest desire to know what the argument was all about, she joined her husband in shouting loyally: “Yes, go, go, go”, swinging her frying pan like a sword”” (qtd. in Hayman 140-141). “Weigel assiduously protected Brecht from people likely to waste his time. Her relationship with him was not primarily sexual, but she came closer than any of his other women to replacing his mother. Probably his ability to write such good parts for women roots back to these two” (Hayman 141). Brecht evoked an amazing amount of devotion from the women in his life and it’s rather astonishing how he managed to balance these women in a way that they met his every need. “No writer has ever organized his life more ruthlessly to squeeze every last drop from the sponge of his talent, and no writer had depended more on collaborative stimulus from other people or on a routine buttressed by an efficient and protective wife” (178-179).

As a performer in 2014 it’s interesting to find common ground in the working methods of a contemporary playwright like MacIvor and a dissimilar playwright like Brecht. Brecht was writing in a different time and place—under very different political conditions. Berlau sheds some light on Brecht’s methods: “He found it simpler to write a play when he could think of certain actors, at least in the main roles. He could visualize how they would move and speak [...] Most of his plays Brecht wrote for Helene Weigel. She took no part in the work of writing, but she inspired him as an actress. It must be acknowledged that *Mother Courage and her Children*

owes its existence to the existence of Helene Weigel” (Bunge 69). As I look at my work with MacIvor and try to place myself in it as well as my influence on it, I have to note that he (like Brecht) often writes with an actor in mind for the role. Having the image of an actor for the character in his head helps MacIvor to propel the piece forward, even if that actor doesn’t end up performing the role. MacIvor will even change a role (especially if he is directing) to more fluidly incorporate a new actor in a piece or an actor taking over a role originated by another—incorporating something unique that that actor might bring to the part. Circumstance and necessity seem to be coming to the fore as stronger influences than musedom in the creation of a play. Who are the actors and what can they bring to the work? My relationship with MacIvor as an actress is clearly more akin to Brecht’s relationship with Weigel as an actress, than that of his relationship with Berlau. However, I wasn’t his wife and I didn’t participate in the day to day “domestic upkeep” of MacIvor as Weigel did for Brecht—MacIvor was quite capable of doing that himself.

Berlau compliments Brecht on his work ethic: “Brecht comes fresh to rehearsals—and usually ahead of his fellow workers. From the very moment he enters the theater he is in his element, a fish in water” (Bunge 191). Well, it’s hard not to imagine anything else. Anyone would be able to come to rehearsals fresh and relaxed and ready to go if they had a coterie of “collaborators” tending to their every need. Something tells me the women who worked with Brecht might have been a little more exhausted when *they* arrived at rehearsals. Berleau describes her work for Brecht as well as Hauptmann’s: “I collected material for him. He himself never visited libraries” (Bunge 68). “Each [collaborator] helped Brecht in his own way, by collecting material, making copies, inserting corrections, and so on. And each of them Brecht put to work in that particular way” (76) “She [Hauptmann] discovered John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera*, translated it for Brecht from the English, and then joined directly in the writing of *The Threepenny Opera* [...] She was always willing to work till she dropped [...] She was herself a writer, and she placed her talent at his disposal” (76). And Hayman relates: “With her [Weigel’s] diligent housekeeping, she eased his way into a working routine more arduous [...] The workroom was heated to be warm enough for him to start writing regularly at 8 every morning. He was sensitive to cold and always nervous of catching colds” (Hayman 179).

MacIvor does draw on collaborators and co-creators to support his work. Daniel Brooks is a prime example of someone with whom MacIvor has collaborated closely with over the years, as well as Richard Feren as a sound designer. But he has also drawn on strong female support over the years: Sherrie Johnson was his former producing partner in *da da kamera*, Kim Purtell has worked extensively with him on the lighting and set designs of his shows, and in recent years he has been working fairly regularly with dramaturge Iris Turcott. Again, we have to return to the collaborative nature of theatre; it's not unusual to have many different artists involved in the dynamic of taking a play to the stage. The difference here, between Brecht and MacIvor however, is that I don't believe MacIvor exploits his collaborators in any way—and he isn't using “romantic love” or sex to keep his female collaborators beholden to him. I don't think one could say the same about Brecht.

I don't mean to indicate that Brecht wasn't just as devoted to his work as the others—clearly work was his life...it's just that “his work” had a lot of hands in it. And it's hard not to believe that he didn't manipulate women by using the love that they felt for him to get what he wanted. If this is musedom, then no thank you.

Ruth Berlau was clearly an intelligent and ambitious woman, and along with her beauty this attracted Brecht. She had bicycled to Paris and Moscow before she was twenty and wrote about it for different newspapers. The Moscow trip ignited her interest in communism—something that she and Brecht had in common. She was a sometime actor (and admittedly not very good at it), she translated works for Brecht, she was a writer, and while living in New York in the mid-1940s she was the voice of a radio show that broadcast to Denmark—and she was a photographer. However, she never saw herself as a photographer but she took up the cause to document Brecht's work. She was a woman of many talents, yet the focus of her life was Brecht and she never strayed from her obsession even after his death. While living in New York she became pregnant with Brecht's child, and in 1944 in the seventh month of her pregnancy she was flown to Los Angeles where the birth of the baby was to be kept secret from Weigel (Hayman 288). Brecht was living in Santa Monica with Weigel. Berlau's child, named Michael, was born prematurely and died after only a few days. This was a huge blow to Berlau and her mental health began to deteriorate. Back in New York in 1945 she ended up in a mental hospital on New Year's Eve—which resulted in her receiving electro-shock therapy for weeks (299-300).

Again I wonder at the capacity Brecht had to inspire such loyalty in the women who loved him and lived for his work. And for a man deemed to be very private about his personal life, he was naïve about the fact that his affairs were quite apparent to anyone within his circles.

After a triumphant return to the stage in *Mother Courage* in 1949 after returning to Germany, Weigel was shortly thereafter installed as artistic director of the Berliner Ensemble. Berlau's later years with the Berliner Ensemble were tortured and heartbreaking. Berlau was tasked with creating an archive: "Brecht wanted everything connected with his work to be preserved. Unfortunately, I believed him when he told me I was the right person to take charge of the archive [...] The significance of my work was neither recognized nor appreciated by the members of the Ensemble. It was a true labor of Hercules" (qtd. in Bunge 181). Berlau's behavior was becoming more and more erratic during this time and her drinking was increasing. Meanwhile, in 1953 Weigel wanted to divorce Brecht; she had stability now and had finally had enough of his affairs, but the split didn't last. Bunge relates that: "Brecht needed Helene Weigel. And he needed her for his work in the theater, not for any vague idea of keeping up the pretense of an idyllic family life" (Bunge 271).

If Berlau had any vestige of hope in a permanent commitment from Brecht it was certainly dashed at this point. Bunge relates how the reunion of Brecht and Weigel affected Berlau: "For Ruth Berlau this was a great blow [...] She tortured Brecht with her boundless jealousy. She hindered him in his work—at home by constantly besieging him with telephone calls, in which she alternately swore her love for him and covered him with abuse; and at conferences in the theater, where she allowed herself to be swept into acts of the maddest sort [...] In the hopelessness of her situation she took more and more to drink, and then she would blame Brecht for making her drunk. Several times she had to undergo psychiatric treatment, which served only to exacerbate her nervous excitement. She felt betrayed" (Bunge 271-72). Brecht did show loyalty to Berlau by protecting her as much as he could while he was alive, but after his death in 1956 the Berliner Ensemble felt no sense of "moral obligation" and cut Berlau loose from the company. She was even forbidden to enter the building (272). Ruth Berlau represents an artist whose own talent was subsumed by the exploitative nature of Brecht's preoccupation with his own work. She died in a hospital bed suffocated by the smoke from a fire. She had had two glasses of wine and a cigarette. She died in 1974 (275).

Perhaps Berlau's life would not have met with such a sad ending had she never met Brecht but, of course, this is impossible to know. Berlau was a victim of "musedom" brought on in part by Brecht and in part by her own demons. Bunge shares some insight into the tormented relationship between Berlau and Brecht: "The published edition of Brecht's poems contains a quatrain that runs: 'Failings / You have none / I had one: / I loved.' This poem was discovered in two places: in a letter to Brecht from Ruth Berlau and among her manuscripts on a page containing others of her poems. Ruth Berlau might even have been the author of these lines. What they express applies to them both" (Bunge 264). It may apply to them both but instinct tells me full credit for this poem probably belongs to Ruth. "Once, long ago, Ruth Berlau had learned from Brecht that love and collaboration went hand in hand, that one could not be isolated from the other" (271-272)

Weigel was ultimately shrewder and stronger than Berlau and she eventually parlayed her relationship with Brecht into her much deserved directorship of the Berliner Ensemble. She was not only an actress who brought life to Brecht's characters on the stage, but she also enabled him to have a life offstage—and even though Brecht didn't seem to deserve her devotion, Weigel stood by him during his dalliances with other women (which were innumerable) as well as during their fifteen years of exile. Hayman elaborates: "Her personal loyalty was reinforced by an element of masochism, by lack of confidence in her femininity—a lack Brecht did little to remedy—and by total belief in the importance of his work. If he needed a woman for his writing, that woman must be tolerated" (263). Her perseverance paid off and she managed to outlast them all, even Ruth Berlau.

There's no comparison to be drawn between my relationship with MacIvor and Berlau's with Brecht—although as a woman I have empathy for her situation. Berlau let her obsessive love for Brecht subvert her own talents as a writer and theatre artist. Weigel and Brecht provide a somewhat similar dynamic to that of me and MacIvor—in the context of Weigel being one of the foremost actresses to interpret Brecht's work on the stage. There are indications that the union between Brecht and Weigel was largely non-sexual, but clearly their symbiotic found itself through their collaboration in live theatre. That bond proved to be unbreakable—so there seems to be some correlation between the symbiotic connection of playwright and actor on the stage being a good measure of a long term relationship off stage.

Chapter 7 - Four Female Theatre Artists Talk about the Muse

As I continued my search for the muse in relation to a playwright, I spoke to four female theatre artists about the concept. I was interested in their definitions of a muse and how they felt about the term. I was also curious to see if any of them could cite a male muse in their work or the works of any other female artist. The conversations were surprising and enlightening. Of the four women I spoke with, two of them were performers in *The Lorca Play*: Paulette Phillips (a professor at OCAD, filmmaker, writer, and multi-media/interdisciplinary artist) and Valerie Buhagiar (an actor, filmmaker, writer, and theatre artist). I spoke with Phillips and Buhagiar individually at their own homes—at their kitchen tables to be specific. I spoke with Kirsten Johnson (an actor, painter, filmmaker, and theatre artist) and Alison Lawrence (a playwright and an actor) at the same time over a drink together at the Butler’s Pantry in Toronto. The following is a distillation of those conversations.

“You know, I’m just going to be honest, it means absolutely nothing to me [Laughs]...absolutely nothing.” So began my conversation with Paulette Phillips when asked what she thought of the idea of a “muse.” Phillips went on: “I don’t understand the term, it seems old fashioned and something that is not at all like...honestly it seems romantic and old-fashioned. And it’s not something that I would ever use as a word. So it doesn’t mean anything to me.” She doesn’t take offence to the term as a woman or as an artist, but Phillips feels it has no relation to the way that she works. This led to a discussion about where artists get their “ideas.” How does that inspiration happen?

Phillips’ work covers a wide scope as an interdisciplinary artist. She’s written plays. “I’d probably just call it a text that gets performed,” Phillips laughs, “but it could be called a play.” She’s made films, she’s created visual art, and she recently worked on a piece for Toronto Dance Theatre. Phillips smiles: “One thing I’ll probably never do is paint. I’ll probably never paint, but I certainly—I’m really interested in making objects...sculpture to go along with—I call it—let’s say *events*...the event of a film or the event of a performance.” For example she created “walking ferns” for an installation in a Victorian Garden in England. But more recently she has been occupied with the polygraph machine. “Part of the overarching interest I have is in early technology and electromagnetism—I’m interested in finding physical material ways to psychological and sociological...conditions. So if we talked about love we talked about an

attraction between two people and then I would think, well let's use magnets because they're perfect—and I've been using magnets for years. So I'm interested in structure and behavior...thinking about things in a kind of philosophical way, but then thinking about them in the material way and that's kind of how ideas come to me.”

While working on the “walking fern” installation Phillips had received as a gift, a book, *The Secret Life of Plants* written in 1973 by Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird and it related the work of Cleave Backster who was using polygraph instruments on plants. Phillips was struck by the experiments: “He hypothesized with a polygraph that plants had emotional reactions to people in their environment and that they exhibited fear and joy and had memory—sense memory and I became fascinated by that.” This fascination led to Phillips buying a polygraph machine on eBay, doing research on the polygraph and eventually taking a training course in Baltimore and becoming a certified lie detector. “But I still didn't know what my project would be, I still didn't know how it would turn into art. But I knew how to use it, I knew how to interrogate.”

Phillips' journey with the polygraph brought us back to the idea of where one gets inspiration and what to call it. “I think the perfect word that I would feel comfortable with is intuition,” says Phillips. “I definitely feel comfortable with the word intuition. Because I think that's what we work on, you have a sense that that's the right way to go. You don't exactly know, because you don't know where you're going, but your intuition tells you to turn there. Go down that road. Oh, okay, that looks good. I feel really comfortable with that word above any other word.”

Phillips has been working with the polygraph for so long that she recently started pondering what her next project would be: “I'm a bit of a workaholic and I've never not had something that's been propelling me forward really fast. And then, I met this guy in Vancouver and he said ‘Well my first wife had multiple personalities’ and I went oh my God—multiple personalities—and it was just like one of those moments, like *Sybil*—you know it's my era, it's when I was growing up, it's pop culture. So all of a sudden I became absolutely obsessed with *Sybil*. So it's not a muse, but she's now...she's now the thing I'm on about. And it just fit, your intuition goes, this is absolutely right.”

Valerie Buhagiar's initial response to the meaning of the word "muse" is simply "to inspire," but she's not entirely sure if she believes in the concept of a muse and her first thoughts go to the inspiration of [Charles Dodgson] and *Alice in Wonderland*. When I ask her if the term "muse" takes something away from the female as an artist in their own right she laughs and says, "It can. I've felt it. Another person that comes to mind is Gena Rowlands and John Cassevettes. I don't know how she was treated back then but, you know, I love her and I know he wrote things specifically for her." Buhagiar starred in two films directed by Bruce McDonald: *Roadkill* in 1989 and *Highway 61* in 1991 (with screenplays by Don McKellar) and at that time some might say that she was McDonald's muse. Buhagiar elaborates on that theme: "Okay, I'm going directly to personal stuff here—you know—when *Roadkill* came out—a critic said to a good friend of mine, 'Sure Valerie's a good actor or sure Valerie was good in that, but you know, she's just in it because she's Bruce's girlfriend.' I wasn't Bruce's girlfriend at the time when we were shooting. I was somebody else's girlfriend actually, and I already acted in more things than Bruce had made at that point, so yeah, it diminished my work quite a bit. And then *Highway 61* came out and—this is only in Canada—but perhaps it's because people in Canada knew the details of my relationship to Bruce—because by this point [by *Highway 61*] we did hook up, and so people would write: Valerie Buhagiar, Bruce MacDonald's real life partner, or life partner or whatever they called me—girlfriend—but no one talked about my work."

Shortly after that time Buhagiar wrote a short film called *The Passion of Rita Camilleri* and she talked about the frustration she felt when she was looking for financing: "I didn't get funding first time around because people said that they were afraid it was going to be a Bruce McDonald film. It's called *The Passion of Rita Camilleri*. It's about an eight year old girl whose best friend dies in a house fire and she sees Jesus flying and she's Maltese. What of Bruce do you see in that? And it's my story—it's a true story. It's about my best friend dying in a house fire when I was in Grade 3. So these were hurdles that I had to keep overcoming and I think I was young and numbed myself from all of the bullshit and kept going until I made it. I made the film." The film went on to receive multiple awards including the Silver Plaque Award at the Chicago Film Festival in 1993.

We went on to discuss whether or not an entity like the Catholic Church can be considered a muse, or a location perhaps? Like MacIvor, Buhagiar had been brought up in a

devout Catholic household—a Maltese household. Buhagiar was born in Malta and there’s a strong sense of her culture in her work even though she grew up in Toronto. Her films are often punctuated with Catholic imagery and she says: “Religion, a story, a picture, the location. Like this house made my feature film. I sat at this table right here in this position and wrote, and in three days I had a feature script. You know, seeing the house, the house was a big part of it.” Buhagiar is referring to her latest feature *The Anniversary* which she shot in her own home over two weeks in December of 2013. This summer (2014) she taught a filmmaking workshop near Spanish River outside of Sudbury, and credits the location for inspiration in writing the piece which she would create with the actors who were part of the workshop. “I had to write for that location and that location was incredibly inspiring. There’s the Spanish River with canoes, so in the opening shot in the morning mist—there’s a woman singing Spanish, a Spanish song, canoeing along the river and it’s gorgeous. You hear the echoing of her singing and [see] the red canoe barely in the mist. And it was the actors—what do I have and what can they do? Luckily one of the women has Spanish, so she can speak in Spanish. I did all these improvised games with [the actors] to get a sense of who they are and what they’re capable of emotionally. And that’s how I wrote my story.”

Kirsten Johnson questions the idea of location and/or religion as muse when I ponder that idea over a glass of wine with her and Alison Lawrence. “But what’s different about you and the Catholic Church and Cape Breton Island is that *you* can be molded and made to do things.” It’s a good point and it’s an interesting conversation as the idea of a “muse” rubs Johnson the wrong way as a concept—the idea of being “molded” by another as if one is an inanimate object is a good argument against the concept of being someone’s muse. Johnson admits that a recent encounter helped to spark her dubious impression of a muse. “I was sitting at a bar by myself and I perhaps looked like I was looking for a friend...and this man came over and we started talking and it was a great sort of animated conversation, we started talking about art and he’s a musician, he ran an art gallery, and he was multi-disciplined, as am I and we started talking along those lines. And then at one point he said, and I don’t know if this was a flirty pick up line or it wasn’t, but anyway it rubbed me completely the wrong way when he said, ‘I’m looking for a muse’. And I just thought like, who the hell do you think you are? And I just kind of ended it at that point. I shut down. Like how high and mighty you must think of yourself. And part of that though, if I must be honest, is that, because I’m not used to taking up space as an artist. I just do that classic

thing of being apologetic, especially if I don't know someone very well, I will say, well I'm working on this...it's not going to be very good and....and I don't really know what I'm doing. It just comes out so naturally and I hear myself do it and on the outside I'm going, 'What are you doing? What are you doing?' So another reason why I was so angry at him was just that this innate birthright—that he felt he could talk about being an artist in that vein which is probably just...I'm just jealous and I should be saying that.”

Alison Lawrence ponders the concept of a muse for a playwright: “I find that, when you say muse—I don't know about muse but when I write and re-write my relationship with my daughter and my relationship with my mother over and over and over again—people have actually commented on it—that usually in my work there is *this* relationship or there is *this* relationship. And they're very happy relationships—both of them, but I work them out all the time, over and over and over again. I don't know if that's a muse.”

Johnson admits to a muse-like working relationship with experimental theatre director Hillar Liitoja: “He certainly didn't refer to me that way, but there was a muse-like relationship in the fact that he settled in his brain, on the fact that I was going to be Ophelia [in DNA Theatre's eight hour production of *Hamlet*] and he came up with a concept for the mad scene that—to make a long story short—I just thought was untenable. I couldn't do it—it possibly could get me arrested. And I thought about it—I was 21—and I thought about it carefully. I really gave it careful consideration, but no I release you from your promise, if there ever was such a thing—I cannot do this scene as how you are imagining it, so if you need to find another Ophelia, I understand. And then he thought about it for a few days and he said, 'No, you're my Ophelia, you're it, you're it'. But then weirdly, what happened—I just saw him a couple of days ago and he brought it up again—20 years later, 25 years later he brings it up—'Oh I wish I could have done that scene.' In that case I felt that muse was very similar to pawn.”

This brings the discussion back to the theme of being molded and Lawrence adds: “I've always been really fascinated by models, you know—like when you see one model that has worked for a particular painter for a long time and so often. That's what I always think of in terms of a muse, that there's somebody who's molded somehow. It's like you're part of the artwork in some way. You don't hear about that much in terms of an actor anymore.” Johnson suggests: “Tilda Swinton was arguably a muse for Derek Jarman. She's referred to as such, I

mean she's also referred to as a collaborator. He's the movie director who did gorgeous, really theatrical filmic [work] like *Edward 11*."

We went on to talk more about the collaborative nature of live theatre—and in the context of “inspiration” and creation—the relationships between playwrights and actors. Johnson says: “Well *we* know it's collaborative because we do it but I think people perceive it in a way that it's not collaborative, I think the general public sees actors as pawns.” Lawrence adds: “And there's often a sexual element because I think about the playwrights... David Hare wrote for Kate Nelligan all the time and there was definitely a thing that people—I have no idea whether they were involved or not—but that was the inference about it. Tom Stoppard, at one point wrote a lot for Felicity Kendal, and his marriage broke up, during that period, and certainly with the artists and their muses there was always that element.” Johnson brings up a famous couple: “A weird example I think, is Arthur Miller and Marilyn Munroe, because I think maybe initially, the initial attraction was that classic sort of muse-like, but then, all the stuff he wrote for her—which I think is just *After The Fall* and *The Misfits* are about a deeply troubled woman. So it's not like, oh she's so glamorous, he was the only one who knew, no she's really upset.”

So Johnson and Lawrence have come up with some male playwright/female actor relationships that possibly move into the realm of musedom, but what about a male muse for a female artist? Buhagiar had laughed when I posed this question saying: “Jesus is in a lot of my films. So that's a bit of a muse.”

Bittergirl was a very successful play written by Alison Lawrence, Mary Francis Moore and Annabel Fitzsimmons in 1999. Although the play is a comedic look at failed romances with inspiration taken from their personal lives, Lawrence doesn't consider her exes muses. However she does relate an amusing story about the dynamic of the female playwright to the male actor. “In *Bittergirl* the first guy [actor] in the show kept saying: ‘so, what are you saying about men here?’ Or ‘maybe I should write something about guys’. He would “joke” [about it a lot] and we just kept turning to him and going ‘Yeah, go ahead, write something about guys. Call it *Bitterboy*. See how many people come’. [Laughs] Because it was just like, ‘shut the fuck up and do what we're telling you to do.’ That was my first experience really, writing in a major way, writing for someone who wasn't me. Anything I'd written before, I'd written for myself [Laughs]. I am my own muse.”

Johnson cites a possible male muse in an actor with whom she was once very close friends: “I went through a stage with Peter Lynch and I think it was mutual. But I just knew that what he would bring [to a project] would be unlike anything anyone else could do. It would just be very odd and—because he’s not an “actor, actor”—he’s just got a whole mess of craziness that he’s going to bring to it. I did make a film about him one time, it was just basically him...drinking beer in different bars wearing a lamb hat. It was like a little white hat that I sewed ears on and he was just drinking and drinking and drinking and then he just looks at the camera in a very serious way and also in a very beautiful way. I knew he could wear a lamb hat and not just play it for laughs. If I said now play this one absolutely seriously, he would and it would come across and have that sort of pathos.”

I’ll leave the final analysis of “Four Female Theatre Artists Talk about the Muse” to the four female artists themselves and their enlightening thoughts on the subject of inspiration:

JOHNSON: When I think of muse, I think of somebody that you don’t understand. I think of the muse as being someone who is just always unreachable. Especially the Pre-Raphaelites...they were unattainable and they were too high up, so I think maybe that’s why it’s an awkward fit for women to talk about—like, is that your muse—no it’s not actually. I think women sort of tend to be more empathetic and willing to put their brains into another person’s brain.

PHILLIPS: I am kind of fascinated by people...people don’t know I’m watching them. And I’ll watch them, I’ll watch them over a year...I’ve made several works about people I was quietly watching who have no idea that I made work about them and it’s not about them—it’s just that they were a catalyst for a thought process and they embodied the idea of that somehow, they were the inspiration.

LAWRENCE: Eleanora Duse used to say “Each time it is given to me.” And people used to talk about that...that they were a channel, that the art came from somewhere and I just channeled it. I just have to stay out of the way.

BUHAGIAR: As far as women having male muses...or female muses...I don’t know, I mean, sure maybe religion’s my muse or my friend Diane [inspiration for *Rita Camilleri*], but I think the story is the muse. Not her.

PHILLIPS: Yoko Ono is a perfect example of why I have trouble with the word because she was a huge and a really significant artist and John Lennon happened to fall into one of her exhibitions when she was installing, and [Lennon] had never had any real encounter with contemporary conceptual art and kind of was blown away. So for him, she opened up a whole radical new world. But she had always been...you know she didn't operate for herself as a muse, she was always a fully formed and very avant garde, and an advanced artist and he was a pop star who didn't know anything about that. I mean she was demonized.

JOHNSON: A part of me would like to have the balls to just present myself as more of an artist—present myself as the artist I think I am to the outside world. Because I really would like to do that and I actually get quite angry at myself when I shuffle and cough and whatever, because I feel like I'm not doing a service to myself. I also feel like I'm doing a disservice to all my female artists. I feel like we should all get together and take up more space but it's just so ingrained that we don't.

And regarding my search for the muse...

JOHNSON: I mean, you could just explore, maybe there is no answer.

Chapter 8 - A Short History of Me and MacIvor: *A Beautiful View*

June 21, 2005 – Letter from MacIvor in San Francisco to Gillis in Toronto

I've been staying in and writing quite a bit—lots to do, sometime between now and January, I have to finish *A Beautiful View* draft [...] And by the way I'm thinking we may go with a totally new idea for the poster based on the shots Guntar [Kravis] took. There is a shot of you and Tracy just looking into the camera, you both look beautiful and intense—it's as if the viewer is actually your beautiful view. It's very simple and arresting [...] I'm very excited about it, not just the poster, but the play as well. (MacIvor)

At this point I think it's important to talk about workshops. The “workshop” has become an integral part of Canadian theatre creation and the “workshop production” is a major part of MacIvor's method of developing many of his plays. With his theatre company da da kamera MacIvor combined the workshop and rehearsal processes—and the public performances of the play during the workshop became an important part of getting down to the essence of the piece. By performing and workshopping the play in front of a live audience MacIvor and his company were able to gauge with an audience what was working and what still needed to be done.

One example of a play that was created and that thrived under this process was MacIvor's play *The Soldier Dreams*. It was a beautiful and haunting piece that directly addressed the losses we were feeling as a community from the deaths of many of our friends and colleagues from AIDS. Ken McDougall and Albert Chevalier had already been lost to the disease at this point. The story presented a disparate group of family members and friends sitting vigil at the bedside of their dying (lover, brother, and friend) while the dying man in the bed dreams in flashback, his meeting with a former lover. The play went through two major incarnations over a couple of years (first at Buddies in Bad Times) and finally culminating in a da da kamera co-production with Canadian Stage (at the Berkeley Street Theatre) in 1997. It received a Dora Award for Best Production that year. By the time we had reached the final incarnation, we had lost yet another friend in performer Mark Shields—he had been part of the first workshop of *The Soldier Dreams*. The grief in the play beautifully addressed the grief of a theatre community and beyond.

From the mid-nineties and into the 2000s MacIvor honed his meta-theatricality into a fine art producing phenomenal productions with his company. Solo shows like *Here Lies Henry*, *Monster* and *Cul de Sac*, as well as the two-man show *In On It*, benefited greatly from the care

given to their development through workshop productions. As a company da da kamera liked to have all the designers, performers and artists associated with the show in the same room from the first day of rehearsal right through to opening—to create a cohesive group working toward the same goal. It was a way to keep everyone on the same page—rather than the usual model of cast and crew meeting on the first day of rehearsal, and then going into their separate departments to work on their own and not meeting again until closer to the opening performance. With the da da kamera method, the company members became part of the fabric of the piece and in this way MacIvor continued his working relationship with Brooks, while building relationships with other theatre artists along the way including Andy Moro (lighting and design), Richard Feren and Kim Purtell. Many of MacIvor’s plays have had workshop productions which led up to full scale productions and international tours of the shows. He has premiered workshop productions of his plays with companies that ranged from Festival Antigonish in Nova Scotia, Usine C in Montreal and the Wexner Centre in Columbus, Ohio.

It was at the Wexner Centre that we first presented his two-woman play *A Beautiful View* with me and Tracy Wright in 2006. But *A Beautiful View* had gone through many incarnations before 2006—and even after as we toured from Toronto to Ottawa to Montreal, then to Charleston, SC, New York and back to Toronto again, the play continued to develop. The play follows the friendship of two women, Liz and Mitch, starting in their early twenties and follows them through to middle age where they meet an untimely end after encountering a bear while on a camping trip. But it’s funny. Really. The two meet, and have a one-night stand—and when they meet up again a year or so later they discover (while talking across a tent) that they each mistakenly thought “the other one” was a lesbian.

MITCH: Are you alone?

LIZ: No my husband’s at the site.

MITCH: Your husband?

LIZ: Yeah.

MITCH: A man?

LIZ: Well yeah. Why?

MITCH: Oh no, just how's that working out?

LIZ: Good.

MITCH: Have you switched over entirely?

LIZ: To what?

MITCH: ...Men?

LIZ: I never left. Well I mean, there was you.

MITCH: What do you mean? There was more than me.

LIZ: No.

MITCH: I thought you were a lesbian.

LIZ: No. Does that matter?

MITCH: Well. No.

LIZ: Do you only sleep with other lesbians?

MITCH: I'm not a lesbian.

A moment. They consider this.

MITCH: That's funny.

LIZ: Or sad.

MITCH: Yeah.

LIZ: *(heading off)* Maybe I'll see you tomorrow.

MITCH: Yeah. (MacIvor 222)

The discovery was invariably one of the biggest laughs of the show.

A Beautiful View is an important piece to talk about in terms of workshopping and in terms of what inspired MacIvor to continue transforming the play until it became a vehicle for Tracy and me. It started as a play with six or eight characters that MacIvor had workshopped at

the Wexner Center with students of Ohio State University. I have never read that version; all that remained in the first copy I received was the title as far as I know. In the first incarnation of the play that I read, the piece was cut down to three characters. Wright and MacIvor would be playing a straight couple, and I was to play MacIvor's wacky and neurotic sister who popped into their scenes occasionally. At one point the sister enters wearing an Anne of Green Gables straw hat with red braids, and at another point (after a facial peel) she enters wearing sunglasses and a scarf wrapped around her head. My other role, in this incarnation of the play, was a bear who hovers "ominously" over the couple as they get together and their relationship develops. In a one night workshop performance in the back room of the Cameron House Tavern in Toronto, I had to open the show decked out in my bear costume while dancing to Mary J. Blige. We rented a bear costume from the Stratford Festival. The bear was, I believe, representative of the inner fears of the couple played by Wright and MacIvor. Every time the couple reached a critical turning point in their relationship the bear appeared looming behind them, and even physically enveloped them in some cases. It should have been scary and foreboding on some level when the bear appeared, but the only bear costume available from Stratford was a female bear complete with a tiara and long beautiful eyelashes framing her very kind eyes. We were able to remove the tiara but there was no getting around the fact that this bear was very pretty, and extremely non-threatening. But this is the beauty of bringing things out in a workshop. The bear costume was probably not going to make it to full production. (The costume was returned to Stratford but the "bear" theme remained.)

Shortly after the workshop at the Cameron House, MacIvor went on a retreat to meditate for ten days. He wasn't allowed to speak at all, he and the other participants in the meditation had to keep their eyes downcast so you wouldn't be distracted by looking someone in the eye, there was no technology allowed and even the use of a pen wasn't permitted. MacIvor started to re-write the play in his head. After the retreat, when he returned to speaking society, the new play flooded out of him. The piece had transformed into the two-woman play tracing the friendship of the two characters over many years. Tracy and I were actually rather shocked by the change and I think as friends we were a little wary of the ambiguous relationship between the two characters. But MacIvor's instincts were right and by using the friendship that we had established over many years since meeting for beers after *Indulgence* back in 1989, he gave the show an emotional truth (in essence) by writing for us...or writing toward our own personalities.

Through performing with Tracy in *White Trash Blue Eyes*, *The Lorca Play*, and *Jump*, and sharing an apartment in Kensington Market for a year where we had a male cat named Brenda, through heartaches, lost loves, deaths and gut laughs Tracy and I had a solid basis for playing the eccentric and rather mismatched friends in the show. MacIvor took that energy and put it on the stage. Of all the characters I have played for MacIvor this is probably the closest I have come to playing myself, albeit it a heightened version of myself with a storyline that wasn't exactly mine. In this way, as actresses and human beings we impelled the play, and the playwright, forward by providing the spirit for the piece. It was one of the most satisfying pieces of theatre I have ever done—and being on stage with Tracy Wright is kind of like having a cup of tea and walking a tightrope at the same time. She was pretty astonishing on stage and her choices were always unpredictable as an actor and a friend. This dynamic worked like a charm in *A Beautiful View*. On a personal note I have to say that the loss of Tracy to cancer in 2010 was one of the worst times of my (and many others of course) life which makes *A Beautiful View* all the more important looking back. MacIvor couldn't have known the future back then, but this play was a gift for me and Tracy, one that I will never forget.

June 8, 2006 – Gillis Journals

Last night we opened [*A Beautiful View* at the Spoleto Festival in Charleston, SC]. The show went really well. A more cavernous space than we're used to but we handled it well. We were a little worried about how a more conservative audience might handle the play, but they were surprisingly supportive [...] Daniel, Tracy and me went to Folly Beach about 20 minutes outside of town today. The ocean was beautiful. White fine sand that is still covering my body. I'm finding it in my ears. There was a wind that felt warm and luscious and the water was so warm. The waves and the undertow were stronger than I've ever felt in the ocean...even in Nova Scotia. We stayed fairly close to shore and were quite buffeted by the waves there. They just knock you over and we all got some sand burns from the force [...] The waves turn you into a kid again. You have no control. We screeched and we laughed. I'm pretty lucky in this life I have to say. (Gillis)

Chapter 9 - An Interview with Daniel MacIvor

The following interview took place on Sunday, August 10, 2014 over the phone. It has been edited for sense and to streamline the text, but it is otherwise verbatim. MacIvor had not read any drafts of this thesis, although we have discussed the topic to certain degree. I wanted to ask him the following questions with as little influence from what I have written, as possible.

ME: Where would you say that you get your ideas for your plays? What's your inspiration?

(Pause) That's a big question, I know.

HIM: (Pause) I guess it's two things—the first one would be, what my particular obsessions are at this particular moment so I guess I would say “what life looks like” for me is the first place that I get my inspiration—what's striking me, what I'm dealing with or contending with or interested in. And then the thing that I'm also interested in—what an audience is looking for right now...so it's two things: it's what's going on for me, where I am on my path and...and what I feel or where I feel the theatre is on its path. So there's two things that work at the same time. For example, you know I had a theatre company for many years and I made theatre in a very particular way...and then I made a conscious choice to leave that kind of work and be a playwright, just strictly write plays which is a different kind of thing, and I've been doing that now and I'm...quite conscious of the fact that this play that I'm writing now is going to be my last play—for a while—of this sort. And then I'm starting a theatre company again so I'm going to start working in a way I used to work. I think in a way I take inspiration from a structural, kind of architectural place...and also from a very personal place.

ME: I'm reading [thinking] a lot about you as a young playwright these days, but can you see any themes that have followed you since your early twenties as a playwright...that you're still exploring or trying to figure out?

HIM: Yeah, you know, sure. I don't think...I think that I really—all the plays are about trying to make sense of being...of being on earth and being alive...you know those kinds of—I mean I think that my plays are—they're not political plays, they're psychological plays about human interaction and human behavior and they're also plays that are about performance, a great deal. My training was in performance, not in writing—writing was just something that was part of my DNA and performance—I guess performance was too, but performance is something I was

trained in, so I think that—I'm always interested in performance—so that's two things—that's the actor's work but it's also the human's work, which is, humans are performers, we perform. So I think that all the plays are that, and all the plays are about what we don't say and what we...death—you know, I wouldn't say I write about love, I would say that's something I don't write about...but I think that the other themes of death and sort of existential...a very...very...gentle existentialism...what things appear to be and what they really are...those kinds of things...all the plays are about the same things I think.

ME: So, when you decide to write a female role—you write amazing parts for women—what makes you decide to write it in a female voice?

HIM: It doesn't feel that way to me though. It doesn't feel like I choose. It feels like...the voices are there...I mean...often there are people that I want to work with and so then I write for those people and those people are often women and so that's how that happens. But the voice, you know, the voices I was raised with were the voices of women so I guess that's the voices that are in my head. But, you know—I have to be more conscious when I'm writing for men, like more than women—that's my default to write for women. When I make a choice to write for a man—and I'm not including myself in solo work—when I'm writing a multi-character play I have to make a conscious choice to write for men. So it's—I guess it's because the women, women's voices, I was surrounded by women's voices as an infant and a child and those voices are in my head.

ME: So taking me out of the equation—and this thesis that I am writing for a second—if you hear the word “muse” how would you define it? Like a Muse, maybe even thinking of it as a capital M—how would you define that word or what does that word make you think of?

HIM: It's a bit foreign to me. Just to answer your question simply I think of like Picasso, I think of these sort of classic artists—classical type artists—I think of heterosexuals, I think of men fucking women [ME: *laughs*] and kind of wanting—or whether they're trying to seduce someone with work. It seems like a very sexual, romantic, old fashioned word to me. It doesn't feel...it doesn't feel contemporary to me it feels like an old idea. But, but I guess looking back and looking at that word...it's almost like muse is a verb...well it is a verb so...you muse on something but, the idea of—the muse is...I don't know it makes me think of like a desire to connect and a desire to, in some ways, if I speak of you I say yes I wrote for you because I knew

you and I knew your voice but, I also wrote for you because I was very interested in keeping you employed. [ME: Yes. *Laughs*] Because you were my friend and I wanted us to work together and it was selfish—but I also wanted to take care of you a little bit and make sure you had work—but I feel that way about—you know, you and Tracy were both muses for *A Beautiful View*. I wanted you to work together and I wanted to spend time with both of you.

ME: I wanted to see what you thought of [a muse] outside of the realm of me, because I guess my final question—just to sort of cap off my thesis—is to say...well do you think I...I think you've already partially answered it anyway, but would you think of...would you ever have thought of me as your muse or am I your Muse? [*Laughs*] No pressure.

HIM: Well, no, I think that I...I think you're my friend. Yeah. No...it's just that you know, this all came up with Kate Taylor who was looking for a way to kind of contextualize something, that I don't think—it didn't feel right to me—it felt forced. [But] I think that...historically I think that it's a valid statement to say that you are a muse for me. Because I think that if you look at any of the playwright relationships with people, who are considered muses, I don't think it probably felt like that to some of them, but we look back on it and we see that, that's what it is if you know what I mean. I think there's an academic truth to it—I think that in actuality it's too reductive...in life...like it's just a reductive idea to live...you can't live that idea...it seems ridiculous to imagine living that idea. But upon reflection, yeah, I suppose it's valid.

ME: It's, I guess what it's—and I'm chiming in here when I said I wouldn't—but, I guess what I'm feeling...in my head lately as I've been exploring the idea of it more and more, I just keep seeing a figure eight, I keep feeling like it...if we're supposed to use the “muse” in the context—especially of live theatre—and a playwright and an actor, then it feels very reciprocal to me, that it's a moving energy, like you said earlier, like a verb—like if you *are* going to use the word “muse.”

HIM: Well, it depends on if—you know if you look at a play like *A Beautiful View*, that's a very different sort of relationship than we have, and if you look at a play like *Communion*—that's again—those are very different kinds of relationships in terms of the playwright and the actor. (ME: Exactly) Yeah. So, so I think that the figure eight exists in *A Beautiful View* in a way that...it's more of a square or something in *Communion*.

ME: Do you have anything else you want to add or do you feel...?

HIM: You know, it's also ineffable what we do, in this kind of work, especially the theatre, I think because it's a living art form and when you try and contain it by calling it whatever you call it—if you call it post-modernism or realism, or if you call relationships—the relationship of the muse or whatever—you know it always feels like you're trying to put something, you're trying to put...air in a box or something and it's just...it feels forced. But I think that's the difference between...living it and reflecting upon it.

ME: Right. Right. So....who are the actresses in [his next Tarragon Theatre show] *Cake and Dirt*? [Laughs]

HIM: Who are the actresses in *Cake and Dirt*? Umm...Maggie Huculak, Bethany Jillard, and Maria Vacratsis.

ME: I sort of thought it might be funny to mention that at the very end.

HIM: And the reason why Caroline Gillis isn't in it is because she was doing her Masters at University of Guelph. [ME: laughs] And couldn't be available. But I'll tell you...also I think that...the way the thing developed was that originally, neither the role that Bethany's playing, nor the role that Maggie is playing...neither of those parts was for Caroline. Maggie is a very different being than Caroline is and the role is very different. And then originally the part that Maria's playing is an immigrant—so that also didn't really fit, so there kind of wasn't a part for her. [ME: Right. Laughs] Which is...that happens...but I mean had Caroline been available—the interesting thing is maybe that part would have existed because I would have allowed for—you know I've said this to you before—I think it's a fallacy to say that a great actor is a person who can play any part—I think the actor has to bring his own baggage and soul and whatever to a part so that you—you're utilizing who that person is—not what they could become.

ME: That's great. That's a really good way to put it. I feel like I should ask a question about university—because I sort of start this talking about university so—no but you've already brought it in so—thank you for telling me to go back to university—it's worked out really well.

HIM: Excellent.

ME: Now, what am I going to do in September?

HIM: Get your PHD?

ME: Okay. Great. There you go. I'm going to stop now.

Chapter 10 - Conclusion: Redefining the Muse

If musedom exists it cannot persist over time—unless you are one of the Greek Muses incarnate on earth. Somehow. The whimsical part of my nature wants to believe that the Greek Muses do exist on some plane, doling out their rewards of inspiration to the favoured ones, and punishments to the doubters in an unabashed acceptance of their exalted role as Muses. They are not subsumed by the artist, to whom they provide the talent. Their heavenly status renders them incapable of being exploited. They are the real thing. The actresses striding purposefully toward the audience in *The Lorca Play* present an image of that rarified confidence, but albeit filled with power and intensity these actresses are ultimately human. The Greek Muses were the real thing. They provide the voice and the cadence and the melody—and they can withdraw those gifts whenever they deem fit. So, if I truly believed I was MacIvor’s Muse, I would be punished by these goddesses for my presumption.

I didn’t become an actress because I wanted to be someone’s muse, and I wasn’t born to be a muse. And MacIvor doesn’t write because of divine intervention. He writes to understand what’s around him. If people need to externalize that inspiration in the form of another being, then maybe it’s a case of whatever works. However, externalized human muses are in a vulnerable position—as they change and age they are in danger of being exploited and discarded dispelling the romantic notion of the muse. And since the muse is almost exclusively female it’s understandable that some feminists would abhor the word.

In conclusion I must measure myself up against the different roles and definitions of the muse that I have explored in these pages. Am I a muse? And, if so, how does that relate to live theatre? Throughout this search I have been challenging the validity of my role as a muse, and I’ve reached the point where I have to discount or credit myself with that title.

As I neared the end of my paper I realized that I had focused much of it on my history with MacIvor and what he has brought to me as an actress, a theatre artist and a human—which is an important part of this exploration, but what have I brought to MacIvor? It’s hard to answer that question. As someone who started this search for the muse with a “discomfort” about my possible association to it, it’s clear there lives in me a reticence to take credit for supporting MacIvor over the years as a friend and a co-worker. Certainly, I have been mentored by MacIvor on a certain level. He’s not afraid of opening new doors or leaving things behind—and I have

benefitted by following him through a lot of those doors. We've always had different approaches to life. I remember how astonished I was when years ago, he had misplaced the key to his bicycle which was parked in downtown Toronto. He decided to just leave it there. It was a "crappy Canadian Tire bike" and he figured it wasn't worth the bother to get someone to saw the lock off. Meanwhile, I was the person who would repair my second hand bikes—which was kind of like putting a band aid on in the rain—over and over again until they were inevitably stolen. But I hope to think that I have also provided mentorship to MacIvor through my friendship as well. By working with him from an early age we developed a trust—and I think my trust in him as a writer and a friend helped him to build confidence and to believe in the validity of his work, even throughout the difficult times of poor reviews and the disappointment that a life in the arts can often bring. And I believe *that* trust and support is the energy I bring to the rehearsal hall for him, which helps to facilitate the creation and productivity of his work. This doesn't mean I was Hester Thrale to his Samuel Johnson. Thrale provided succour beyond helping Johnson with his writing, and played nursemaid to Johnson's tenuous mental and physical health. Hester exerted a crucial influence on his home life and inner well-being (Prose 31). I've never provided the role of nursemaid, and I wasn't the bombshell that Lee Miller was in her younger years—providing Man Ray with a beauty that would haunt much of his work. MacIvor wrote for me because he knew that I was the right person to bring illumination to whatever his "particular obsession" was at the time through my performance as a character in his plays. Miller did go on to her own successful career as a photographer, starting in fashion, but eventually branching out into taking arresting photos during the height of the Second World War. After settling into domestic life with a husband and child, Miller eventually abandoned her craft in anger and depression, and her famous looks faded with age and heavy drinking. I have never felt that my association with MacIvor has thwarted my own craft as a theatre artist, but I often wonder if I never married because of a fear that my work may have been subverted by domestic life.

I have no doubt that my career has been enhanced by my work with Daniel MacIvor. It may not have been what I envisioned when I was riding around Sydney on a banana seat bike with my neighbour Dorothy, but I feel privileged to have been swept up in a new wave of young theatre artists who were challenging the theatrical conventions in the late 80s and on into the 90s.

MacIvor didn't pluck me out of obscurity and put me on a pedestal to paint me over and over again. We stepped into the world of theatre at the same time and if writing was in MacIvor's DNA, I think it's safe to say that acting was in mine. Circumstance brought us together, but friendship kept us together.

So here's what I hypothesize (if I may be so bold) as to whether or not a muse can exist for a playwright in live theatre. Although the term is somewhat obsolete, maybe we can give it validity in 2014 if we accept that the meaning of the word may be changing again—as it has continued to do so over time. I have kept coming back to the idea of a muse being a moving force when we talk about it in relation to live theatre. The vessel that contains that moving force of a muse is the “character,” written in a play and interpreted on stage by an actor. This is why I keep seeing the muse as a reciprocal force. Of course my theory is in no way scientific and I can only relate what I keep seeing visually as I work my way toward the end of this thesis—and that is the figure eight. A sign of infinity. If we think of the crossover point in a figure eight as the nexus, then the nexus is where the character lives. The forces and energies of the playwright and the actor travel through the nexus in an infinite cycle as they swirl around each other. The nexus is where the character can be molded and transformed—it can be changed. So, in this world of the “character” the force that is created between the actor and the playwright can be stronger or weaker depending on the connection of the two artists involved—and I believe that that force can exist even when an actor is performing the work of a deceased playwright. But the blood that courses through the characters I create in MacIvor's plays is filled with all the love, frustration, anger, joy, and history that our personal relationship brings. That's why Olga Knipper's performance of Masha in *The Three Sisters* would probably be superior to my interpretation of that role—and I suspect that Tracy and I would pull off a better performance of *A Beautiful View* than Knipper and Helene Weigel in the roles of Mitch and Liz...but, I would pay good money to see that version.

So if we take part of Arlene Croce's definition of the muse, that the muse “must impel the artist forward” and “be good for that art”—along with my hypothesis that the muse exists in the character—then I would have to say sure, yeah, I am a muse...or at least I have been a muse for Daniel MacIvor...but as a playwright he has had many muses.

Looking at actresses like Knipper and Weigel we can only assess part of their story—ultimately biographies can only surmise what their lives were like or how they felt about their associations with their famous counterparts. Of course we associate Knipper and Weigel with those famous playwrights, because the playwrights are largely who we know about so we have a slanted view of Knipper and Weigel through the lens of Chekhov and Brecht. In this thesis I have drawn on my history with MacIvor—and admittedly this is not a biography or an autobiography—but there is a whole other life to me outside of MacIvor, and MacIvor has a whole other life outside of me. We are still close, but in middle age we aren't joined at the hip like we were in our younger years. We still talk and laugh and support each other, but gone are the days of dissecting the minutiae of our daily lives together as roommates or over the phone or over endless pints of beer. We're a little healthier than that now. I would say that our work together in shows does contain a reciprocal musedom, but off stage we provide each other with friendship. If you ask me now if I am Daniel MacIvor's Muse (and I use the capital M at the risk of incurring the wrath of the Greek Muses) I would definitely answer: "Yes...sometimes."

At my request, MacIvor wrote a list of "life rules" for me once and I think it's a good indication of the strong almost familial bond that we still share—and the advice is universal which is why I have decided to use his list to conclude my thesis. When Daniel and I were roommates (MacDonnell Avenue back in the nineties) I went through a phase where I was using a lot of rocks (crystals and the like) in my everyday life in an attempt to find some kind of direction or answer. Before I left our apartment one day I had typed at the top of a blank page that I left in his typewriter: "Please tell me how to fix my life without the aid of rocks?" (I think we were creating a primitive form of email). When I returned Daniel had typed an answer.

This is how to fix your life:

- 1) STOP WORRYING
- 2) BUY A NEW HAT
- 3) LEARN HOW TO SING
- 4) FUCK OFF
- 5) DRESS UP AND GO TO THE ISLAND
- 6) RIDE YOUR BIKE EVERYWHERE
- 7) TELL BAD JOKES

- 8) EAT VEGETABLES
- 9) BUY FLOWERS INSTEAD OF BEER
- 10) PLANT A TREE FOR SOMEONE WHO WANTS TO
PLANT A TREE FOR YOU

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