

“IF ONLY THEY’D STOP WAITING”: STAGING WESTERN CANADIAN DRAMA IN CENTRAL EUROPE

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ABSTRACT

The best of contemporary theatre in Western Canada presents stories of the historical, cultural, and ethnic diversity of the region while taking a critical stand against the traditional stereotypes of “prairie realism and cowboy iconography” which contributed to the creation of its social, as well as artistic awareness. Western Canadian playwrights reflect in their works the wide multicultural spectrum of their region, without writing mere “ethnic theatre” with limited readability and appeal. This is documented by several instances of producing Western Canadian drama “out of its context” – specifically in Central Europe. In the Czech Republic, it was the productions of Brad Fraser’s *Kill Me Now* by theatres in Ostrava and Mladá Boleslav in 2017 and 2019, respectively, and the production of Vern Thiessen’s play *Lenin’s Embalmers* by a Liberec theatre which premiered in December 2017. The article discusses the productions of Western Canadian plays by Czech theatres, with special focus on the dramaturgical decisions and theatrical presentations concerned, as well as on the critical and audience response the productions have received, with the aim to demonstrate that Western Canadian drama presents not only a valuable source for cultural and theatrological study, but also inspiring material for meaningful stage productions in Czech – and potentially European – theatres.

Keywords: Canadian drama and theatre; regionalism; Western Canadian theatre; theatre dramaturgy; Vern Thiessen; Brad Fraser

The development of regionalist discourse in Canada

It has been noted by numerous theorists, as well as cultural practitioners, that “Regionalism, in its cultural, economic and political aspects, is at once one of the most common and contentious terms that Canadians use to characterize their country” (Keefer, n.p.). In many senses of the word, Canada has been defined by strong and distinct regional identities, often at the expense of the sense of clearly recognisable national unity. Consequently,

Regionalism, since it reflects not just geographic but also economic differences, is a powerfully political factor in Canadian life, and accordingly, a lively sense of regional awareness

goes hand in hand with pressure for political justice, particularly in the “have-not” regions of the country. Moreover, in Canada the autonomy and vitality, or dependence and depression, of individual regions are seen to have a crucial bearing on the country’s very survival as a nation, and this realization has had a significant influence on the prominence and fortunes of regionalism as a literary phenomenon. (Keefer, n.p.)

The history of regionalist discourse in Canadian literature is long and complex. In the decades following the foundation of the Confederation in 1867, practically all the scarce literary production in the country was embraced and interpreted as simply Canadian, in view of the need to support the agenda of the newly emergent community striving to articulate and justify its desired unity, and little or no attention was paid to possible regional characteristics, despite the claim made later by Northrop Frye in his *Essays on the Canadian Imagination* that “[w]hat affects the writer’s imagination ... is an environment rather than a nation. Regionalism and literary maturity seem to grow together” (xxii; qtd. in Ricou, n.p.).

The debate concerning the interplay of regionalism and national identity has evolved in relation to the situation of the country and its community at the given moment, and in view of cultural influences from the outside world. As Craig S. Walker noted in one of the most influential books on Canadian drama:

For most of Canada’s history as a nation, its citizens have been unable to articulate a clear sense of place through their culture. There has been no shortage of nationalist sentiment about the matter; but, as Frye implied, the country is too vast and differentiated to lend itself to the sort of clear and ready formulations that those of a nationalistic bent have often sought. (Walker, 5)

The reasons for the persisting and dominant presence of the regionalist imaginary in Canadian cultural discourse are both geographical and historical. As a political structure, modern Canada emerged from a set of individual mutually unrelated colonies, most of which had longer histories as independent units than as parts of a larger state-forming project. As the geographer J. Wreford Watson explains:

Separation has been more long-standing than togetherness; difference has had a longer sway than unity. In a sense unity grew from without rather than from within. Fear of absorption into the United States and impatience at dependence on Britain did as much to bring regions together as the need for trade between the colonies, the opportunity of forging transcontinental communication links, or the fact of sharing the same environment. Whenever the United States tried to induce Canadians to join with them they aroused a sense of national distinctness in Canada that dispelled any idea of continental fusion... But when the fear of absorption by America finally abated, and when the need to be free of Britain was acknowledged, then the pressures that made the Canadian colonies unite were greatly relaxed, and the old, underlying regional differences sprang up again. (Watson, 21)

Despite its prominent position in Canada, regionalism did not always receive sustained and serious attention in theoretical and critical discourse. It was only towards the end of the last century when the situation changed; Herb Wylie, one of the most prominent Canadian literary scholars, notes:

With the cohesion of many Western nation states being gradually undermined by economic globalization and the growing influence of transnational corporate culture on the one hand and the growing antientric pressures and a decline in nationalist sentiment on the other, regionalism is starting to receive more sustained scrutiny. At the same time, debates within the field of postcolonial inquiry have suggested the need to develop more nuanced and less totalizing conceptions of postcolonialism and postcolonial literatures, and that shift of emphasis from cohesion and unity to diversity and differentiation suggests, especially in the case of Canada, the possibility of an intensified interest in regionalism as an important element in constructing a more heterogeneous model of postcolonial writing. (Wylie, 139)

While in the past Canadian scholarship in the field mostly tended to examining regionalism in the context of national literatures and cultures, recently it has consistently attempted “to consider regionalism in transnational, hemispheric, or even global contexts” (Freitag, 199). The transnational approach to regionalism and its cultural manifestations corresponds effectually to the current developments in the field, including the apparent need of redefining the concept of region as such:

Transnational regionalism reads, and re-reads, regional texts from new perspectives while also adding new, previously marginalized texts to the debate. Thus, it enriches and diversifies the imaginary reservoir of a given region, destabilizing and deterritorializing received myths about and unified concepts of North American regions without necessarily doing away with the concept of region as such. (Freitag and Sandrock, n.p.)

The Case of Alberta

For geographical as well as historical reasons, the Canadian West, and its prairie landscape, has formed one of the country’s most obviously distinct and at the same time internally complex regions, producing an authentic and peculiar culture that resists simple and general characterisation. In their work focusing on the literary production of Alberta, the country’s second youngest province, Donna Coates and George Melnyk characterise the cultural dilemmas of the province, as experienced by its artists, as follows:

Writers themselves prefer various terms of self-identification that suit their interests, with “Albertan” not high on the list. Likewise, their works of art are always open to numerous overlapping labels, depending on what aspect literary critics are keen on. In an era when poststructuralist, post-modern, and postcolonial thinking continues to be in vogue, though its influence is beginning to wane, the term “Alberta” may seem irrelevant to mainstream criticism. But it is, we would argue, no less “irrelevant” than terms such as “Canadian” and “Prairie” or even “Quebec” literature. Each of these terms needs to be understood as a general context framing numerous cultural grammars and influences that inform a writer’s identity. Alberta’s contemporary literary house is as dependent on global literary trends, the evolving political economy of the province, and the formative influences of linguistic change and developing critical theories as is any Canadian literature. (Coates and Melnyk, x)

Alberta is famous not only for the breathtaking immensity of its landscape and its wealth in terms of natural resources, but also for its controversial tradition of political

conservatism, ethnic diversity of its population, as well as for its rich and varied culture, namely in literary and performance arts. Aritha van Herk, one of the most accomplished writers from Alberta, speaks about the literary culture of her home province with uncoiled pride and keen insight into its intricacies:

Attempts to essentialize Alberta's literary tradition are about as permanent as snow before a chinook. The writing aligned with Alberta (whether by accident or location) is a chiaroscuro, swatches of light and shade that dazzle and surprise, conceal and reveal. We're identified as young, unformed, the literary school (well, kindergarten) without a tradition or an encapsulating definition. Not for us the solemn blessing of Ontario Gothic or hip Toronto urbanism. Not for us the racy stripes of Montreal translative transgression... The books that erupt from Alberta are too unpredictable, too wide-ranging and varied to be summarized and contained. Alberta writing is a mystery, a tangent, a shock, unexpected and vigorous. (Van Herk, 1)

Van Herk's observations concerning the literary scene in Alberta are equally valid, perhaps even more illustratively, for the development of the tradition of performance arts in the province, and in the Canadian West at large.

Contemporary Drama and Theatre of the Canadian West

The best of contemporary theatre in Western Canada presents stories of the historical, cultural, and ethnic diversity of the region while taking a critical stand against the traditional stereotypes of "prairie realism and cowboy iconography" (Nothof, 61) which contributed to the creation of its social as well as artistic awareness. The most prominent among contemporary Western Canadian playwrights portray in their works the rich multicultural gamut of their region, without writing mere "ethnic theatre" with limited readability and appeal. Their regional belonging and ethnicity are not delimitative and declarative, but constitute a firm, if unobvious and variable foundation for their perspectives on the wide and intertwined scale of current issues and conflicts, many of which concern not only members of specific closed communities but people of the whole region, if not Canada at large – and, on certain conditions, even people beyond the country's borders.¹ As theatre historian Anne Nothof put it in her discussion of contemporary theatre in Alberta:

Alberta playwrights reflect a wide multicultural spectrum, but their focus is rarely on a reification or validation of specific ethnic communities; they are not compelled to dramatize their distinctiveness, although their family and community histories inform the complex moral and cultural dynamics of their works. Their ethnicity is integral to their consideration of a broad range of subjects: from Canadian immigration history, to the dialogic structure of Baroque music, to the tragic consequences of the political exploitation of science. (Nothof, 61)

¹ In this regard, it is of note that Edmonton, the capital city of the province, hosts the largest and longest-running international Fringe Festival in North America, which testifies to the richness and creative responsiveness of the performance culture of the region.

This is why the works by leading authors of this “provincial” dramatic literature are produced not only by community and ethnic theatres but, in equal measure, by leading theatre companies in the West aiming at general Canadian and potentially other audiences, such as *Workshop West Theatre* in Edmonton, *Alberta Theatre Projects* in Calgary, *Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity*, or *Prairie Theatre Exchange* in Winnipeg. Through their stage productions they reach theatres outside the Western provinces and thus contribute to the creation of the larger picture of Canadian cultural identity as a whole. Their success serves as evidence of the long-known but not always fully realised fact that specific ethnic, cultural, and national identity is typically formed in an intricate performative process which is influenced by a number of internal as well as external factors, and which is subject to an endless series of – sometimes “dramatic” – changes. After all, as has been noted – and, more importantly, experienced – regionalism does not need to be:

regarded, as it often is, as narrow, limited, parochial, backward, out-dated or isolationist. In its positive sense regionalism means rooted, indigenous, shaped by a specific social, cultural and physical milieu. It reflects the past as well as the present and at its best absorbs innumerable influences from beyond its borders, particularly as these have bearing on the informing regional perspective. (Bessai, 1)

Due to the complexity of this process, and to the historical, geographical and cultural specifics of the formation of Canada as a country, the articulation of the concept of Canadian national culture remains, after all, indefinite – and open to repeated re-interpretations. In relation specifically to drama and theatre culture in Canada, Diane Bessai matter-of-factly pointed out in 1980 that “[n]either modern Canadian theatre nor modern Canadian dramatic literature is so well-established that one can pronounce on them absolutely at this stage of development” (Bessai, 1), and continued by contending that

There is still no *national* theatre movement per se – at least not one to which we can point as our own special equivalent to Broadway, the West End, or other such models of artistic or commercial success. We do have a National Arts Centre in Ottawa, but from the national point of view this functions only as a theatrical crossroads, insofar as it hosts successful productions mounted in Canadian theatres elsewhere. While the NAC’s recently inaugurated policy of country-wide tours of its own permanent companies has been heralded by some as the long overdue beginning of a genuine national theatre, this is to ignore the real dynamic of theatre growth in this country. (Bessai, 1)

More than two decades after the publication of Diane Bessai’s analysis, Erin Hurley noted that not much has changed – rather, on the contrary:

The category nation is no longer as foundational to cultural production and identity structures as it was even twenty years ago... In short, globalization revalues the role of the nation state, dissociates culture from nation, and restructures national identities. Characterized by neo-liberal economic, political, and social policies which facilitate the flow of capital between networked, metropolitan and/or regional archipelagos of economic activity, globalization’s most pervasive effect has been to diminish the boundary-function and signifying power of national borders. (Hurley, 174–75)

Moreover, this appears to be true not only for the specific case of Canada: “As globalization decouples nation and culture and limits the import of the nation to identity, nation-states lose their hold on the tools through which they represent themselves to the world” (Hurley, 175).

Western Canadian Drama Abroad

This situation proves to be beneficial, if not necessarily for Canadian drama as a whole (loose as the definition of the content of the notion may be), then for individual dramatic texts written by Canadian playwrights and nominated for productions outside their place of origin. It can be documented by several recent instances of producing Western Canadian – that is, regional – drama “out of its context” – specifically in Central Europe. Focusing in the discussion on the Czech Republic (as an epitome of a profoundly diverse dramatic and theatre culture with a long and sustained tradition) in the new millennium, several rare examples deserve closer scrutiny: the 2002 and 2007 productions of Edmonton-based playwright Brad Fraser’s play *Unidentified Human Remains and The True Nature of Love* (1989)² in Ostrava and Prague, the theatre productions of the “black comedy” *Kill Me Now* (2014)³ by the same author in Ostrava and Mladá Boleslav in 2017 and 2019, respectively, and the production of another Edmonton-based author, Vern Thiessen’s play *Lenin’s Embalmers* (2010) by the F. X. Šalda Theatre in Liberec, which premiered in December 2017.

When examining the dramaturgical process of choosing dramatic texts for foreign productions, and for their subsequent realisations, several considerations emerge: firstly, it is the notion of *adaptability*, or *transferability*, of the content and the format of the dramatic text into a different historical, social and cultural context. Secondly, it is the linguistic *translatability* of the text, the possibility of rendering all its explicit as well as implicit meanings and aesthetic and emotional functions in a different linguistic medium. And thirdly, it is the technical, formal *feasibility* of transforming the translation of a formally static text into a dynamic stage production in the new theatre framework and performance practice. All these three aspects are closely interrelated and represent variations of an extremely complex and mutable process of multifaceted cultural transfer, or, in the broadest sense, translation.

Adaptability in Theatre Dramaturgy

As far as the first aspect indicated above, that of cultural *adaptability*, is concerned, relevant decisions are, theoretically, in the competence of theatre dramaturges; the real practice, however, is typically less rigid and formalised. In the cases under discussion, the dramaturgical decisions were motivated by anything but the alleged “Canadianness”

² The play was also adapted into a film, directed by Denys Arcand, one of the most prominent Canadian Francophone film directors. It was released in 1993 as *Love and Human Remains*.

³ Two independent film adaptations of *Kill Me Now* are currently in development, in Canada and South Korea respectively. This seems to prove the universal appeal of Fraser’s “region-based” dramatic work.

of Fraser's and Thiessen's plays, or the desire to use them as representative examples of Canadian national culture – about which there is, after all, very little awareness in the Czech theatre community. The programme for the production of *Lenin's Embalmers* innocently concedes: "Let's admit that we know next to nothing about Canadian drama, which is relatively rich. Our view towards the Western horizon is obstructed by British, Irish and American authors. Bilingual Canada and its relatively close connection to Europe remains in the shadow for us – and it is a shame."⁴

The motivation to mount *Lenin's Embalmers*, a dark, farcical comedy based on the true story of Boris Zbarsky and Vladimir Voroblyov, the two scientists who were commissioned to embalm Lenin's body in 1924, was something very specifically local, and deeply symbolic of the traditional resonance of theatre as a discursive platform in Czech culture, including the love of (self)irony and subversion. The programme distributed to the audience tells a great, half-serious, half-ironic story about it, explaining that when working on the dramaturgical plan for 2017 early in the year, the theatre company suddenly realised that they did not have a play which would commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution. This inspired an entertaining but also chilling reminiscing of the "good old days" when theatre directors were obliged to report to the authorities about how their companies were planning to celebrate whichever communist anniversary, including various subversive strategies to avoid the unwanted duty, and repercussions in the case of its insufficient or inappropriate fulfilment. The tone of these musings is interestingly, and perhaps symbolically, very much in line with the humour of Vern Thiessen's play itself, which was then chosen for the theatre's repertoire, with an irresistible subversive twist. Thiessen's humour is incredibly apt and accurate, and fully resonates with the illicit cultural discourse during communist times – including the gallows humour of the political jokes, which, indeed, bring back many unwanted but pertinent memories for generations of Central European viewers. This is given by Thiessen's family background and sensitive cultural memory that he has always articulated in his works.⁵ Thiessen attended the premiere of the Czech production of his play, and – hopefully not just out of typical Canadian politeness – expressed his commendation for what he saw, confessing:

If someone in a foreign country was writing a play about Canadian historical events (and a black comedy at that) I would be highly suspicious and perhaps even offended. So I think this was probably a very big risk for the company, and I appreciate that. There is a real tension in this production that you would never feel in North America. This era of communism and socialism is obviously still in the blood of some of the actors. You can really feel that. I know that must have been very difficult for some of the actors in the show. I appreciated the actors taking on roles that may have brought up complicated memories for them.⁶

⁴ Printed programme for the production of Vern Thiessen's *Lenin's Embalmers*, published by the F.X. Šalda Theatre in Liberec, Czech Republic, in 2017; translation mine.

⁵ Thiessen's parents immigrated to Canada from Ukraine, then under the Soviet regime.

⁶ Vern Thiessen in private email communication, 20 July 2019; translation mine.

The play was recommended for production to the Liberec theatre by the young director Šimon Dominik, who, quite independently from the author, made a very similar comment about his motivation for the choice, and about his appreciation of the text:

I chose the play because [the author] knows very well what he is talking about, because his is not a distant view into an anthill, because he can see all the minute details and the story is not a mere rhetorical exercise for him [...]. The Western authors' perspective, simply speaking, of totalitarian subject matter which they only know from books, is often superficial and too academic. On the other hand, if I were to write a play about the American Civil War, I would not do any better, unless I buried myself in books for years. And not even then would I be sure about the result; the cultural distance might simply prove to be insurmountable. But for Vern it wasn't. And that is why we could mount his play, because it is believable for us and for our audience, for whom Lenin is not just an image from books. Sure, he is an image as well, but not from textbooks, but from facades, marches, public spaces, shop windows, statues on squares, slogans on bulletin boards in classrooms. And that is different.⁷

Šimon Dominik's comment inadvertently touches upon several relevant issues which, I believe, have been discussed much more widely and openly in Canada than elsewhere – those of cultural appropriation and its implications, and, arguably, also the fact that what makes Canadian culture what it is, is its inner diversity, inclusiveness, and absence of one common point of reference and authority.

In the case of Brad Fraser's play *Kill Me Now*, a deeply touching family drama addressing difficult and controversial issues such as the social and emotional impact of disability, sexual assistance services for the disabled, terminal disease and the right to die, the dramaturgical choice made by the two Czech theatres was not motivated by the Canadian background of the text and its author either. The text was discovered by the prominent translator Pavel Dominik, who coincidentally came across a review of its production in London. The translator described the genesis of transferring the play into the Czech context as follows:

I was attracted by the unusually original theme and was curious about how the author dealt with it. When I read the play, I was enthused by the virtuosity with which Brad Fraser moves within the genre of some sort of black comedy which, however, is not only black but, more importantly, deeply human and very, very moving, without being cheap or sentimental. I translated the text and offered it to [the Ostrava theatre director] Janusz Klimsza, who was immediately drawn to – since he likes this type of dramatic text – the situation of people whose emotions are subjected to extreme pressure, and thus exposed to their very core.⁸

Considering what Thiessen's and Fraser's plays and their Czech productions possibly have in common – which may or may not be purely coincidental – one arrives at the presence in them of dark, bold humour which often tests the established boundaries of what is regarded ethically and emotionally tolerable, expressed in the genre of black comedy. Brad Fraser, who, in the words of Ostrava dramaturge Pavla Bergmannová, "belongs to the most important and concurrently the most provocative representatives of Canadian

⁷ Šimon Dominik in private email communication, 13 August 2019; translation mine.

⁸ Pavel Dominik in private email communication, July 21st, 2019; translation mine.

drama of the last thirty years”⁹ formulated his position among his playwriting colleagues as follows:

There was a time when “black humour” was considered a Canadian trademark, particularly when I was growing up and in my early writing years. These days it seems to have gone the way most humour has, being shunned by academics and a generation of people who are now obsessed with “being nice”. However, my work has always had a strong presence of “dark humour” and continues to do so today. I don’t know a lot of other Canadian playwrights who are willing to go as dark as I do.¹⁰

This quality is precisely what always has a good chance to appeal to Czech audiences and be accepted by them with acute understanding, given the Czech people’s “national character” shaped by historical experience. As a British lady married to a Czech man testified after years of first-hand encounters:

Czechs have known for centuries [that] humour is often the only recourse when caught up in an unwieldy bureaucratic system that praises conformity and rules above individuality and free-thinking. Using humour to “air out” the unpleasant facts of life is as second-nature to most Czechs as the nightly ritual of opening the windows to air a stuffy bedroom. (Prucha, n.p.)

Besides the attractiveness of the subject matter of the play, it is precisely this kind of sensibility that led the Czech directors to choose Fraser’s text. In Czech reviews, the play was repeatedly described as a “masterpiece” (Senohrábek, n.p.), as a “remarkably courageous play” (Širmer, n.p.), or as a “cleverly non-verbatim but perfectly transparent and compact text” (Senohrábek). Petr Mikeska, director of the production in Mladá Boleslav, who, as Senohrábek put it, “is said to be afraid of big emotions, used this handicap to great advantage: he did not allow the actors to sell this excellent, sensitively constructed text in the wrapping of heart-rending kitsch.” This effect was facilitated by the black humour of the text which “holds the sorely tested family in the play together like a life-giving sealant” (Senohrábek). And as the humour connects the characters of the play, so it creates a possible connection of understanding and appreciation between two at first sight distant cultural and theatre contexts.

Cultural Translatability in Theatre

As for the *translatability* of the two plays in question, both cases are demonstrative of the implications inherent in the act of translating for theatre in general. As Susan Bassnett-McGuire, a leading theoretician of translation, put it: “A theatre text exists in a dialectical relationship with the performance of that text. The two texts – written and

⁹ “Společenská tabu odkrývá provokativní hra Teď mě zabij”, *Týden.cz.*, 24 May 2017; translation mine. https://www.tyden.cz/rubriky/kultura/divadlo/spolecenska-tabu-odkrývá-provokativní-hra-řed-me-zabij_431154.html

¹⁰ Brad Fraser in private email communication, 24 July 2019; translation mine.

performed – are coexistent and inseparable, and it is in this relationship that the paradox for the translator lies” (Bassnett, 87).

From the two dramatic texts discussed here, it was certainly Fraser’s *Kill Me Now* that challenged the translator’s inventiveness; the main character of the play is a seventeen-year old boy suffering from cerebral palsy, which severely affects his speech. He is thus a character whose ability to communicate is limited, but at the same time what he says is essential for the meaning and message of the story, so it must be understood by the audiences on a certain level. The Czech translator Pavel Dominik explains:

My biggest problem in translating this text was the fact that I had to graphically capture a speech defect while not preventing the understanding of the content, meaning that the spectators must, at – almost – every moment have an idea about what the character is saying. I spent quite some time reading medical books and studying various speech defects [...] and then I realised that I must approach it completely differently. For one thing, a speech defect can manifest itself very differently in different speakers [...] and, more importantly, an exact copy of reality does not work on stage. The point was to create an “illusion of a defect” – so I wrote to the director in the sense: I defined a defect, indicated in which way it should be performed, and suggested cooperation with a speech therapist. And that is what happened.¹¹

The validity of this approach was proven by the author himself, who pointed out: “Communication is a key issue in the play and while Joey’s lines sound like gibberish they are actually a consistent language I created based on listening to the speaking patterns of people with disabilities. I hope it’s what’s made producers in other countries interested.”¹² In both the Czech productions of the play, the author’s hope proved well-grounded, and was fully met, thanks to the translator as well as to the directorial guidance and acting performances. Actor Robert Finta, who played the part of the “unspeakable” character of Joey, was nominated for the Thalia award, the most prestigious theatre award in the country.

From Text to Speech: Speaking in Another’s Tongue on Stage

Pavel Dominik’s comment cited above proves that a translation is never a finite product, and much less so in the case of theatre. The text enters a context of the stage and undergoes another *transformation*, this time from the written into a spoken and acted form. In the case of the Czech production of *Lenin’s Embalmers*, the directorial solution was found in hyperbole, stylisation, vigour and accented visuality. The director explains:

We chose a highly stylised key, which seemed to us appropriate in view of the content of the text, and well as its hyperbolic character, grotesqueness, and some (potentially) voiceband passages [...] This approach proved to me quite effective in directing some other political

¹¹ Pavel Dominik in private email communication, 21 July 2019; translation mine.

¹² Brad Fraser in private email communication, 24 July 2019; translation mine.

plays in the past [...] The grotesque, surprising stylisation can wash away the rust from notoriously known stories, turn the interest of the audience in an unexpected direction, reawaken their interest in what they have always known, and attack their emotions from unanticipated angles.¹³

Compared to the production of *Lenin's Embalmers*, the stage production of *Kill Me Now* was, as indicated above, very understated, and realistic, almost verbatim in terms of visual representation. Both productions were very successful – which is interesting in the context of this discussion, given the fact that they were mounted by small, regional theatres in the country, and which may serve the argument that Canadian regional drama and theatre is culturally translatable, since it manages to find an optimal balance between the national, local, and international agenda while remaining true to telling strong and engaging stories in an individually innovative and authentic voice. As Diane Bessai concluded:

Regional historical detail can be animated by a gifted dramatic imagination. The universals of personality or individuality are surely best contained within the fabric of a specifically realized time and place. The imagination must soar if that is its gift, but the best chance for its success lies in its continuing reinforcement of that rootedness which makes flight possible. (Bessai, 13)

The success of the two Czech regional productions of the two contemporary Canadian regional dramas, if at first sight – symptomatically – limited in scope and impact, testifies to the correctness of Bessai's conclusion, as well as to the fact that regional, or local, art does not automatically bring about limited, parochial and non-transferable expressions. On the contrary, in its most intellectually and aesthetically accomplished manifestations, it transcends the boundaries of its place of origin, comes into communication with different contexts and creates new points of contact and new meanings. After all, all art comes from a certain place, and is informed by it – and the best of it has learned, instead of denying it, to use the potential of its localisation to the maximum. Bessai's reasoning for the Canadian case of regional drama thus appears generally applicable and valid:

The truly important considerations about contemporary Canadian regional drama are that, first, regional drama establishes the validity of a specific milieu as the subject for dramatic interpretation; second that it draws its strength from the audience interest it thereby generates; and third and equally important, that it feels free to experiment in styles and stagings in order to communicate its particular vision in its own particular way. (Bessai, 12)

¹³ Šimon Dominik in private email communication, 13 August 2019; translation mine.

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**RÉSUMÉ: „KDYBY JEN PŘESTALI ČEKAT“:
INSCENACE ZÁPADOKANADSKÉ DRAMATIKY
VE STŘEDNÍ EVROPĚ**

Nejvýznamnější současná díla dramatu vznikajícího v západní Kanadě reprezentují historickou, kulturní a etnickou diverzitu tohoto regionu a zároveň se kriticky vymezují proti tradičním stereotypům „prérijního realismu a kovbojské ikonografie“, které se historicky podílely na vytváření jeho sociálního a uměleckého sebeuvědomění. Dramatici v západní Kanadě ve svých dílech reflektují široké multikulturní spektrum svého regionu, aniž by psali pouhé „etnické drama“ s omezenou čitelností a dosahem. Tuto skutečnost dokládá několik příkladů nedávných inscenací dramatu pocházejícího ze západní Kanady „mimo kontext“, konkrétně ve Střední Evropě. V České republice šlo o inscenace hry Brada Fräsera *Teď mě zabij* v divadlech v Ostravě a v Mladé Boleslavi v letech 2017 a 2019 a o inscenaci hry Verna Thiessena *Leninovi balzamovači* v divadle v Liberci, která měla premiéru v prosinci 2017. Tento článek analyzuje zmíněné inscenace těchto dvou kanadských dramat se zřetelem jednak k dramaturgickým úvahám a konkrétním inscenačním řešením a jednak s ohledem na kritické a divácké reakce, s nimiž se tyto inscenace setkaly. Cílem je doložit, že současné drama západní Kanady představuje nejen cenný zdroj pro kulturní a teatrologické bádání, ale také inspirující materiál pro objevené a smysluplné jevištní realizace v českých – a potencionálně evropských – divadlech.

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