

THE THEATRE OF LINDA GRIFFITHS

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Abstract

Linda Griffiths, actor and playwright, is a charismatic and vital presence on the Toronto theatre scene from the early 1970s until her untimely death in 2014. She travels across Canada and to Broadway, performing *Maggie & Pierre* after it premieres in the Backspace of Theatre Passe Muraille in 1980. She performs in her final play, *Heaven Above, Heaven Below*, with Layne Coleman in this same intimate space in 2013. Between these two shows, Griffiths works in theatres across Canada all the while maintaining her dedication to Theatre Passe Muraille. Her beginnings in collective creation lead her to experiment with process and with the formal composition of her plays, as well as to continuously navigate between her roles as actor and playwright. This dissertation studies the arc of Griffiths's career in order to reposition her in the field.

It explores Griffiths's experiments with form as well as her embodiment and continuation of the spirit and enthusiasm of the alternative theatre movement in Canada. I trace the development of her œuvre as that of a playwright whose creative process travels the arc from collective, to collaboration, to writing solo for backspaces and mainstages, for both intimate venues and large national theatres, ultimately establishing her as one of Canada's most original and vibrant playwrights. This dissertation analyzes Griffiths's career as she discovers her actor-playwright identity, develops her own distinct creative process, and using her own unique methods writes and performs meaningful, powerful pieces which imagine new possibilities in women's representation.

I draw on original archival research from the Linda Griffiths *fonds* held at the University of Guelph as well as archives and papers in the private possession of Layne Coleman, Griffiths's long-term fellow theatre practitioner. As a kaleidoscopic creator, Griffiths's work necessitates a kaleidoscopic study. The methods of analysis, however, remain focused on archival research into her process. Because of her tendency to write from lived experience and to thoroughly research her subjects, who are often derived from real people, I investigate Griffiths's alchemical methods of transforming truthful material into illusory, fantastical, ephemeral, yet poignant and impactful performances.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family.

Thank you to the Attrell, Fonceca, Jongsma, Mercier, Nelson, Norris, Robinson, Speranza, Wilbur, and York families, as well as to my church community at BBC. Mom, thank you for always encouraging and walking alongside me. Dad, thank you for showing me how to work hard and to adventure wildly. To my stepdad, Darrell, we are so thankful to be your family and for your presence in our lives. To Kimberley and John, Deanna and Phillip, Logan, and Emily, thank you for your wholehearted support and for embracing me into this beautiful family. Pamela, I cherish my chosen sister.

The unprecedented challenges of COVID-19 were surmountable only because of the sacrifices made in love by Kimberley, Linda, and Marlene. There are entire sections of this dissertation that exist because of the care and support of these women.

Finally, to my husband Joel for his infinite love, devout partnership, and his insightful brainstorming skills. He lifted me up when I had given up; he demonstrates true companionship, love, and present fatherhood. He did not say a word when Linda's personal papers found their way into my office and spilling over into our hallway due to sheer volume—a physical representation of the space this process has taken during our entire married life. This dissertation is dedicated to him as well as to our sons: Noah, who was born into heaven, and Jude, our shining light whose presence, love, and playfulness emanates joy.

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Thank you to those at the Archival and Special Collections at the University of Guelph for such a wonderful research environment where (un)arresting of the archives is ensured. Melissa McAfee kindly offered her office for pumping interludes. Graham Burt, Gillian Manford, Ashley Shifflett McBrayne, and Darlene Wiltsie, with her 40 years of archival wisdom, make each visit to Guelph successful and, even more, enjoyable.

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Chi Miigwech to Yvette Nolan for her insights and her willingness to speak with me about Linda, Maria, and Jessica; to Sherri Lawson for her advice and openness to pass on her immense wisdom and stories; and to Jani Lauzon for her talk at Glendon and her conversation afterwards.

So many more minds and hearts contributed to this work. To each of them, thank you. Linda Griffiths deserves this community and our devotion.

Notes to the Text

Griffiths rewrote, reworked, and edited her plays with precision and dedication. She often worked on each piece for years. In addition to copious drafts for each play that fill her *fonds*, she also amassed numerous publications, sometimes two or three of a play. In some cases, the script of a play remains similar amongst publications, and in other cases the script varies. Footnotes explicate script changes and specificities as needed in each section. Full bibliographic details for all of Linda Griffiths's plays are listed in the Bibliography, which is separated into Published Plays and Unpublished Plays, chronologically by publication date.

Additionally, in this dissertation I correct the premiere date of *A Game of Inches*. In *Sheer Nerve*, the only place this solo show has been published, the dating of both the presentation of the earlier draft and the premiere at Theatre Passe Muraille is incorrect (182). Archival traces reveal this play is performed during Nightwood Theatre's Groundswell Festival in 1990 and premieres at Theatre Passe Muraille in 1991; see section 2.2.

Epigraph

May the muses smile.

—Linda Griffiths

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Introduction

Griffiths's Roots and Canadian Theatre History

And all of a sudden I was inventing stuff when I thought all I wanted to do was be a kind of dreamy Ophelia or dreamy Juliet, I wasn't doing that at all.

—Griffiths, *On Saskatoon and Thompson*

Thesis Methodology

Linda Griffiths, actor and playwright, is a charismatic and vital presence on the Toronto theatre scene from the early 1970s until her untimely death in 2014. She travels across Canada and to Broadway, performing *Maggie & Pierre* after it premieres in the Backspace of Theatre Passe Muraille in 1980. She performs in her final play, *Heaven Above, Heaven Below*, with Layne Coleman in this same intimate space in 2013. Between these two shows, Griffiths works in theatres across Canada all the while maintaining her dedication to her home, Theatre Passe Muraille. Her beginnings in collective creation lead her to experiment with process and with the formal composition of her plays, as well as to continuously navigate between her roles as actor and playwright. For these roles, she wins five Dora Mavor Moore Awards, two Floyd S. Chalmers Canadian Play awards, a Gemini Award, a Betty Mitchell Award, and a Los Angeles' A.G.A. Award for her performance in *Lianna*. Griffiths receives two nominations for the Governor General's Literary Award for Drama, and she receives the Playwrights Guild of Canada's Lifetime Award in 2013. In the three-and-a-half decades between *Maggie & Pierre* and *Heaven*

Above, Heaven Below Griffiths works and trains with Canadian theatre legends, becoming one herself.

This dissertation, *The Theatre of Linda Griffiths*, analyzes Griffiths's career as she discovers her actor-playwright identity, develops her own distinct creative process and, using her own unique methods, writes and performs meaningful, powerful pieces which imagine new possibilities in women's representation. In it I draw on original archival research from the Linda Griffiths *fonds* held in the LW Conolly Theatre Archives at the University of Guelph as well as archives and papers in the private possession of Layne Coleman, Linda's long-term fellow theatre practitioner at 25th Street House Theatre and Theatre Passe Muraille. This dissertation is the first study of its kind: a study of the full arc of Griffiths's career with close attention to her seminal works. I proceed chronologically by the date of the premiere of the published version of each script, carefully tracing the process of creation for each piece using archival materials.

By working through Griffiths's canon chronologically, yet also paying attention to her nonlinear creative process, for each play I perform three tasks in this study:

1. First, to analyze Griffiths's process in relation to her identity as an actor-playwright;
2. Second, to consider each work within its specific context both within her career and within the development of theatre in Canada, especially the evolution of Theatre Passe Muraille; and

3. Third, because her plays are incredibly kaleidoscopic in terms of theme, form, design, and subject, this trajectory allows me to attend to recurring patterns as Griffiths continues to grow and learn from lived experience both in her personal and in her professional life.

The focus of this dissertation is guided by Griffiths herself. As a kaleidoscopic creator, Griffiths's work necessitates a kaleidoscopic study. My concerns shift to follow the varying aspects of her creative identity, her theatrical form, and her subjects. As Griffiths as actor-playwright turns the kaleidoscope, I must adjust accordingly based on the reflections and refractions I see. In my study of each play, the central concerns reflect off one another to form interconnected yet very different analyses. These shifting concerns centre around Griffiths's creative process, the form, and subjects of her products. The methods of analysis, however, remain focused on archival research into Griffiths's process. In my close reading of each play, I listen to Linda through these remnants and take this foundational understanding as insight to the published text.

The following chapters cover in depth nine of her fourteen plays with a timeline spanning 1980 until her death in 2014. I choose to focus on her most important works to analyze her critical successes as well as her popularity with audiences. At the same time, while tracing the transformations of her artistic identity and her shifting processes, I attend to the through lines that develop in her work. While Griffiths does not call herself a feminist playwright, many of her plays feature powerful central women characters who demand attention and ultimately demonstrate Griffiths's reconsideration of women's

representation. Because of her tendency to write from lived experience and to thoroughly research her subjects, who are often derived from real people, I investigate Griffiths's alchemical methods of transforming truthful material into illusory, fantastical, ephemeral, yet poignant and impactful performances.

In *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Historiography* Thomas Postlewait quotes R. G. Collingwood: “A body of knowledge is never merely organized; it is always organized in some particular way” and encourages “the readers of this book” to “reflect upon *the ideas they think with*” (23).¹ As much as I do not want to impose order or my ideas upon the writing of Griffiths's history and her work, I have more realistically aimed to watch and develop central arguments and understandings through the chronological study of her career. The resulting through lines of this dissertation are therefore derived from a specific working order of first analyzing archival materials, bringing those to my (re)building of her process, and finally bringing these new understandings to an analysis of Griffiths's work. My overarching purpose remains to

¹ In his introduction on theatre historiography, Thomas Postlewait also quotes Peter Novick's distinction between schools of study deemed “logys,” which are “the science of” something versus “graphys,” which are “the description of” the same topic (Postlewait 2). However, since “*historiology* has dropped out of just about everybody's vocabulary” the term “*historiography* has had to do double duty for both *historical science* and descriptive accounts of historical writing” (Novick in Postlewait 2). Indeed, by defining this study as a historiographical analysis of Linda Griffiths's career, this term does not actually define my parameters but requires additional foundation to be laid. My purpose falls within both sides of this word. On the one hand, Griffiths began her career as an actor in collective creation, an important genre in the alternative theatre movement. On the other hand, by having to root my dissertation in this moment in theatre history and within this cultural and national context of Canada I also necessarily become involved in how this history has been written since it has been a polemic and now somewhat outmoded subject in Canadian theatre scholarship.

provide deeper insight into her work. She is an extraordinary example of the ‘Canadian arc’: beginning as an actor and then moving into writing and journeying from collective creations to collaborations, to solo performances on small stages and then to a single-authored mainstage production at one of the nation’s most prominent playhouses. By focusing intently on her work and understanding the arc of her career, I reposition Griffiths within the field. By investigating and rebuilding her place in the development of Canadian theatre, I propose that her unique and indomitable process and the products it creates have a profound impact on the representation of women and on her audience.

In *The Theatre of Linda Griffiths* I rely upon archival and newly available material. My research in the Linda Griffiths *fonds* revealed a more complex and nuanced history than was outlined in existing studies. Her personal archives are plentiful, their volume so vast that even a book-length study does not provide enough space to explore all its contents.² There are 8.57 metres of materials collected in 71 boxes (*Linda Griffiths Fonds / Library*). The finding aid begins with a box of books, the remaining 70 boxes collect materials, which span the entirety of her career, beginning in the 1970s and ending with her untimely passing in 2014. As I will discuss in this introduction, these materials show that her earliest decade in the theatre spans from 1971 until 1978. These early

² Personal archives are “those defined as the archives created by individuals and family groups” (Carter et al. 1). An issue of *Archivaria* released in 2013 begins with “From the Guest Editors: Perspectives on Personal Archives” in which the authors introduce the topic by stating that “[u]ntil recently, archivists dealing with personal archives have had a modest number of scholarly resources upon which to draw” (1). This field has since become a burgeoning one, with many resources appearing on personal archives since this publication.

records are relatively sparse compared to the preserved materials related to *Maggie & Pierre* and onwards. Griffiths keeps materials related to each of the stages of this show, from her process, to the premiere, and to the subsequent years of touring *Maggie & Pierre*. This pattern continues for each play as Griffiths preserves materials detailing all stages of the process that lead to a product, and often includes materials beyond the publication and premiere. In varying quantities and balances, documents pertaining to research and improvisation of each of her plays remain, including transcripts, notes, various edited scripts, and notebooks. Hard drives are also collected in her *fonds* as well as many floppy discs that appear empty, which often indicates they are now unreadable (Shifflett McBrayne).³

The habit she began as an actor continues upon the premiere of any show: the amassing of reviews. Griffiths also keeps notes, letters, and thank-you cards. She keeps records of interactions with scholars, including articles, requests for interviews, residues of the scheduling, and related documentation. Finally, Griffiths writes prose projects, the largest of which is an unfinished novel. Since this project pertains to Griffiths's theatre work, I only explore her prose that relates to her plays (see Chapter 2).⁴

³ Thanks to Coleman's generosity in sharing unarchived resources with me I can attest after much trial and error outside of the archives that the floppy discs, at least the ones in my possession, are indeed not empty but unreadable.

⁴ Archival traces indicate she works on this novel throughout her career. Coleman also shares with me a late excerpt from an electronic version of Griffiths's novel still in his possession (Coleman, *Sample from Linda*).

Along with these textual residues Griffiths keeps related audiovisual materials. Photographs of productions and her headshots are plentiful, although none are personal unless pertaining to a script.⁵ She includes recorded interviews and events at Theatre Passe Muraille, held for and attended by the theatre's community. Griffiths also keeps records of performances and her improvisational sessions, which become more plentiful for shows created in her later years. I will detail the contents of the archives throughout this dissertation since these tidy paragraphs can in no way represent the intermingling of resources, documents, posters, and ephemeral material that Griffiths preserved. Nor can I describe in this linear form the spider web that I attempt to untangle in this dissertation, an image I purposefully use because of the impossibility of the task. There is no order placed upon her *fonds* as they are arranged as they arrived at the University of Guelph. Materials pertaining to each play are at times together in boxes and neighbouring boxes, or sometimes scattered throughout. I perceive no discernable order to how Griffiths keeps her personal archives. The quantity indicates she certainly puts in a great deal of effort in keeping and maintaining these materials, for decades.

Due to the collaborative nature of theatre, records integral to Griffiths's shows and the processes leading to script production are scattered amongst other archives as well as her *fonds*. I conducted ancillary research using the Theatre Passe Muraille collection and the Nightwood Theatre collection. However, to maintain the focus of this

⁵ Specifically, Griffiths archives photographs taken during her trip with her father to the United Kingdom (Box 13, files 9 and 10).

dissertation these are used sparingly; the material that Griffiths keeps is so plentiful that these auxiliary sources are rarely needed. In fact, even more material exists outside of institutional archives. *The Theatre of Linda Griffiths* relies upon the printed scripts in Griffiths's *fonds* as well as electronic copies of drafts or scripts she had sent to agent Michael Petrasek. In addition, Layne Coleman graciously gave me archival material that had remained at Griffiths's house. This material is comprised mostly of drafted scripts of *Age of Arousal* and Griffiths's later work on *The Duchess*. As the organization of her *fonds* reveal, however, other records scattered throughout these documents exist, including floppy discs from the 1990s/early 2000s, as well as reviews from the late 2000s to early 2010s, and so forth.

As Layne Coleman told me, "She kept everything because she believed in the value of her thoughts and work and she could keep it all" thanks to her home in Toronto purchased with the proceeds from her extensive and grueling tour of *Maggie & Pierre* (Coleman, *Linda Griffiths* - 2). Coleman continues, "she was pretty good at filing it and arranging it so it could be rescued" and goes on to tell me during a discussion of her theatrical device *thoughtspeak*, "Linda knew that when women were oppressed they found other ways to seek power" (*Linda Griffiths* - 2; *Linda Reviewed*). Just so, in her keynote address "Lost & Found: Conversations Within and About Archives," Sherrill Grace addresses an inequality she witnessed during her extensive archival research: "I can attest that women are too often lost in the archives and need to be found, and that finding such women requires peripheral, not linear, thinking" (*Lost and Found* 23). In

Griffiths's case, she could have become lost in scatters across the vast archives of the theatres with which she partners. Instead, thanks to her incredible labour and the use of space to rescue her records, she leaves this self-created resource.⁶ Throughout *The Theatre of Linda Griffiths* I consult unstudied archival records of Griffiths's career in order to attend to these various complexities and fill the gaps exposed by other scholars in their studies of Canadian theatre history, women's representation on Canadian stages, and in existing analyses of Griffiths's work.

In addition, Griffiths as a public and well-known figure in the theatre community often speaks and writes about her pieces in various forms from interviews to publications in academic sources. Grace has "identified 8 categories of archive" to which she adds: "or perhaps I should say 8 places to look for them" (3). She states her "initial question: what are archives and where should we look for them?" and provides the resulting extensive list into which the keynote delves:

1. Public Institutions like libraries and official archives
2. Personal possessions
3. The human body

⁶ Kate Eichhorn in *The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order* observes: "What appears to make archives and archiving compelling to so many feminist activists who came of age after the crest of the second wave feminist movement is the fact that the archive, in a myriad of ways, opens up the possibility of being in time and in history differently" (8). While Griffiths's work is not feminist activism, Coleman's comments to me, along with the powerful content of her plays, indicate she has an awareness of feminist thought and certainly the importance of women's representation. Therefore, I believe that Griffiths keeps her records for such a sense of her work being understood differently, plausibly without rigid definitions and parameters.

4. Film, especially documentary
5. Classical music
6. Art galleries/museums
7. Drama, especially live performance
8. Novels (Grace, *Lost and Found* 3)

She explains, “Even at a glance you can see that this list moves from an ontological space of *real* physical documents and objects to the reproduction of such material to the fictional creation of apparently (convincingly) authentic documents—in other words, stories we make up about real or imagined archives” (Grace, *Lost and Found* 3).⁷

This list includes many of the places I, too, have searched for information on Griffiths, including of course “Public institutions like libraries and official archives” (3). Thanks to great support from Griffiths’s community, I have also considered her work and through “[p]ersonal possessions” and “[t]he human body,” in the sense of relying upon photographs of Griffiths and the memories of those she left behind (3). Finally, Grace’s inclusion of “[d]rama, especially live performance” as a potential archive provides a plethora of opportunity to study theatre artists like Griffiths who have lived much of their life in the theatre. While the purpose of this dissertation is not to reconsider the limits and definition of the archive, I have at various times relied both on institutional archives and sources outside of these official spaces.

⁷ Having attended this insightful talk in 2019, I extend my deepest thanks to Grace for her willingness to share her written document with me for the purposes of this dissertation.

The theoretical resources used in each chapter shift based on the kaleidoscopic nature of Griffiths's plays. Contrarily, the methodology of this dissertation remains concretely built using archival theories and their interdisciplinary interactions with the fields of Canadian theatre history, women's representation on Canadian stages, and in existing analyses of Griffiths work. Indeed, archival research into past theatre events and moments of performance rests upon these two ephemeral and ever-moving fields of study: theatre and performance as well as understandings of personal archives. My introduction to archival theory has been largely through feminist archival studies such as Kate Eichhorn and Linda Morra, in Canadian theatre through the work of Sherrill Grace, and more broadly in performance studies through Elin Diamond and Diana Taylor. As Cynthia Zimmerman writes, "the published text cannot be a full record; it is a blueprint of what was and of what can be. It is what we as readers can share" (19). D. A. Hadfield acknowledges that such traces are integral: "These textual residues remain, their presences and absences casting light on some of the systemic restrictions and possibilities that shaped the development of a work, and some of the audience expectations or assumptions that a production did (or did not) fulfil" (37). Just so, Darren Gobert writes in "The Field of *Modern Drama*, or *Arcadia*" in 2015: "these changes [found amongst archival videos and drafts of Stoppard's *Arcadia*] become visible only if we use the tools of literary criticism. They remind us of a central fact of our genre: text can sometimes do things that performance cannot" (294).

Griffiths's actions of seeking to publish her work and her continued efforts to save records of her artistic process demonstrate her understanding of the importance of textual remnants. Yet, the movement from which Griffiths grows has become notoriously well-known for a refusal of such textual residues. Even in his piece for *Linda Griffiths*, Paul Thompson recalls his experience of the improvisational creation of *Maggie & Pierre*: "Mainly it was just Linda and me, though design allies and objects would flow through. No retinue for the director, no stage manager for the actor, and nothing was written down. It seemed that the room was the archivist of our experience and nothing was in danger of being lost" (17). Griffiths, on the other hand, has spoken of her decision to do some writing during this process. In fact, she would attend their improvisational sessions with notes, hiding them from Thompson but relying upon them during the creation of *Maggie & Pierre* through her actor self. She both works within the established methods and pushes against them.

Griffiths's connection to and work within Canadian theatre history simultaneously aligns with and contradicts some existing studies. She productively and purposefully rests her artistic identity within this undefined in-between space. This study of Griffiths's career relies upon her perspective in order to attend to these inherent complexities and contradictions. Griffiths is a perspicacious creator, well aware of her audience, of her subject, context, the importance of form, and the entirety of the theatrical event including the influence of her intense presence within the space. If archives have the underlying "assumptions" of "preservation and value" then performance too carries with it similar

weight (Grace, *Lost and Found* 2). Since performance makes claim on the past and in a charged yet ephemeral present, the act of witness, of watching, of perhaps participation, can also endure into the future.

While this study takes Griffiths's published scripts as its primary source, the archival methodology allows for a literary perspective to be assumed in the analysis of the process of creation for each of Griffiths's plays. This consideration is then used to impact a literary analysis of the published script. This methodology allows for a consideration that rests on the text-performance axis. Just so, Diana Taylor in *The Archive and the Repertoire* writes, "embodied memory, because it is live, exceeds the archives' ability to capture it. But that does not mean the performance—as ritualized, formalized, or reiterative behavior—disappears" (20). Elin Diamond's "Performance in the Archives" speaks to these concerns in a moment of direct address:

The archive sits in its silent vault, but when you and I take hold of it, it becomes a performance site, a materialization of an implied narrative already spatialized and arranged. Like performance, the archive is a site of transformation, its 'material substrate' transformed by touch and interpretation into knowledge. Like performance, the archive solicits and interacts with a reader/spectator who, drawn by texts, objects, or perhaps something unlooked for, is seduced by desirous identification with writers, figures, and events. ("Performance in the Archives" 22)

Linda Morra also speaks of complexities of archives in her *Unarrested Archives: Case Studies in Twentieth-Century Canadian Women's Authorship*, a study of "Canadian women authors' literary records housed both in and beyond official institutions," in which she posits: "The twentieth century thus offers a critical moment when women could increasingly appear as citizens, as public figures, and, as is pertinent to this book, as authors" (*Unarrested* 3). In her considerations of five meanings of the root "to arrest," the last definition suggests: "While institutional archives might physically hold or 'stop' papers, they also contradictorily allow for ideas to be circulated as researchers gain access to them and render them public. If the arrested documents within a formal archive suggest stasis, the act of arrest also paradoxically allows for mobility—specifically of the ideas to which a general public will have access, rather than the papers themselves" (*Unarrested* 10).⁸ Therefore, the unarresting of archives, which pertain to the visibility of women authors cannot be performed by the archive itself, but by the visitor, witness, attendee, or spectator. Morra ultimately explains that "[t]he title of this work, *Unarrested Archives*, derives its logic from a fifth nuance of the word 'arrested': to 'fix one's attention' or 'keep our minds, ourselves, resting or fixed upon the consideration of a subject'" (*Unarrested* 11). Just so, *The Theatre of Linda Griffiths* works methodologically through a fixed attention on Griffiths to ensure her contribution as an actor-playwright remains in the public domain of circulating cultural memory.

⁸ Morra responds to "Derrida's formulation of domiciliation and politicized space" in which he states that archives are under "house arrest" (Morra, *Unarrested* 7–8).

Finally, this approach to Griffiths's *fonds* and archival traces stems from Griffiths herself. I take the textual products of her work as the primary focus, yet by considering how the unarresting of her archival traces impact these texts I also refuse, as Griffiths does, to have this dissertation be fixed solely on an analysis of her published products. Once again, this methodology follows Griffiths's negotiations with the complex duality of process/product, her place in which she articulates so succinctly in "Process?" Archival traces brought into this dissertation pertain directly to the texts at hand. Any personal materials included in the archives were only consulted if they, once again, pertain directly to the texts.⁹ However, limits inherent in this formulation pertain to what is not said because what is not kept or seen does not enter into my purview: "We cannot physically remember or keep everything, whether in institutions or our minds, and guidelines for selection are inevitable" (Grace 2).¹⁰ Such guidelines necessarily exist

⁹ As Linda Morra writes, "Finding dirt, it seems, is part of the research process, and feeling dirty, if not actually being so, is implicit in being a researcher in archives" ("Dirty" 8). I take my responsibility as the author of a book-length study of this playwright's work, not her personal life, very seriously. I do engage with personal or private details, but only when they pertain to the text and its reception, see *O.D. on Paradise* and *The Darling Family*.

¹⁰ Cox similarly explains, "Most archivists now agree that, save for special kinds of archival records in certain media for certain times and places, usually rare or very old records, or those with high intrinsic value as material artifacts, all records cannot possibly be kept on an enduring basis by archives. Hard choices must be made" (Cox 174). In 2016 Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor's "From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empath in the Archives" appeared in *Archivaria*. Here they propose "an ethics of care" that "would transform the reading room space from a cold, elitist, institutional environment to an affective, user-oriented, community-centred service space" (24). This sense of an affective responsibility certainly relates to Griffiths's reiterated statement of feeling a responsibility towards her characters, just as Caswell and Cifor describe of archivists: "seen as caregivers, bound to records creators, subjects, users, and communities through a web of mutual affective responsibility" (24). While this dissertation does not explore this question, it is rife

within this study, beginning with Griffiths's choices regarding what she includes and excludes from her papers. As for my role as researcher, it is well understood that archival reconstruction can never rebuild the moment of performance and I do not attempt to do so. Yet, attention to theatre archives is an urgent matter, as Kathryn Harvey explains: "severe cutbacks to Library and Archives Canada and other Canadian memory institutions . . . that have trickled down to affect the 800 or so archives across the country as well as all the provincial and territorial archives councils" ("The Urgency of Archives" 5).¹¹ Harvey makes a compelling argument for the urgency of conducting more research on Canadian theatre using archival material.

Finally, in this study on Griffiths I acknowledge the possibility of a hagiographic approach. I hope this outcome has been avoided. To maintain my focus on Griffiths with an eye towards others who also deserve in-depth archival study and analysis of their canon, I conclude with her words from *Spiral Woman and the Dirty Theatre*: "There are a million stories in the Dirty Theatre, this is merely one of them" (Griffiths, *Spiral* 39). Indeed, each of these important stories deserves attention. Of the extensive archival

with possibility considering Grace's statement that "[p]laywrights and novelists create fictional or stage *real* archives" (12). It is one of many potentialities that remain at the intersection of theatre and performance research with archival theory.

¹¹ Kathryn Harvey is an Archivist at the University of Guelph who has published insightful articles in the *Canadian Theatre Review* on the archiving of theatre material (Harvey, "Tangible Archives of the Intangible"; Harvey, "The Urgency of Archives"). Harvey also edits an issue of this journal on archival matters that includes Jessica Riley's "Finding Urjo Kareda in the Archive." Here, Riley explicates her research into Kareda's dramaturgical work, citing material from the Judith Thompson *fonds*, another wonderful example of the importance of archival work in Canadian theatre scholarship (Riley).

records pertaining to Canadian theatre, much of it remains fruitful yet unexplored territory.

Thesis Outline

This study comprises four chapters. I have drawn divisions between chapters based on naturally occurring chronological gaps in writing between the final play of a chapter and the first of the subsequent. In each of these segments, Griffiths writes and performs in three distinct configurations: as a playwright and solo actor, as playwright and acting with others, and as only playwright.

I begin my exploration of Griffiths's work in Chapter 1 by considering *Maggie & Pierre* (1980), *O.D. on Paradise* (1983), and *Jessica* (1986). She embarks on the creation of these pieces as a seasoned performer who has already been involved in collective creations and audience hits. In this first phase of her career Griffiths creates each of these plays collaboratively as actor/playwright. *Maggie & Pierre* premieres in 1980, a solo show improvised by Griffiths with Paul Thompson's directorial oversight, and both receive credit as co-writers. Griffiths tours the country playing the titular characters, Margaret and Pierre Elliott Trudeau, as well as Henry, a journalist who also speaks as a voice for the Canadian public and through whom the actor-playwright expresses her perspective. Griffiths then writes *O.D. on Paradise* with Patrick Brymer, which premieres in 1983 without Griffiths in the cast; for the first time she develops a piece as

playwright and with very little presence as actor.¹² Working again with Paul Thompson, Griffiths joins his collaborative project with Indigenous creator Maria Campbell in 1980. Together Campbell and Griffiths create the play *Jessica* whose process follows such a complicated and tumultuous path that they publish the script in *The Book of Jessica: A Theatrical Transformation*, the majority of which is comprised of their conversations about the creation of the play. The first iteration of *Jessica* premieres in 1982, the second in 1986, and the book is published in 1989.

By thoroughly considering archival traces of each of these texts I develop an in-depth understanding of the process of creation that I argue develops Griffiths's artistic identity. These remnants variably reveal Griffiths's transformations between actor and playwright. I argue that Griffiths begins to explore and express her own concerns during the improvisational process of creating *Maggie & Pierre* while still working within her foundational education in collective creation. Continuing her explorations of process and her own creative identity, *O.D. on Paradise* is the first play in Griffiths's career that she writes as playwright rather than through improvisation. The production and remount of this play also figure prominently in the history of Theatre Passe Muraille—in the Strawberry Tea incident, awards, libel—and the mythological significance the production takes on within the community. Finally, turning to *Jessica* and *The Book of Jessica* I explore the hitherto unexamined archival traces of the recorded conversations between

¹² I use this phrasing because Griffiths does not rely upon improvisation to co-write the piece and she does not act in the show's premiere at Theatre Passe Muraille, but she does play Joan in the earliest production of *O.D. on Paradise* at 25th Street House Theatre in 1982.

Maria Campbell and Griffiths. By considering the entirety of their conversations from the recorded tapes rather than taking *The Book of Jessica* as final product I argue, with Yvette Nolan's discussion of the play and its process in *Medicine Shows*, that the relationship between Campbell and Griffiths demonstrates the need to consider this collaborative project as an ever-rippling process and not as a definitive (textual) product.

Building on Griffiths's development of her artistic identity through the varied creative processes she is involved in during the 1980s, in Chapter 2 I argue that Griffiths rededicates herself to creating responsible art with a renewed emphasis upon telling her stories. She continues working with fellow theatre practitioners to create the three pieces in this phase of her career, *The Darling Family: A Duet for Three* (1991), *A Game of Inches* (1991), and *Spiral Woman and the Dirty Theatre* (1993), each bears only her name as playwright. In this rededication to telling her stories Griffiths likewise turns her focus on women's representation. Each protagonist in the seminal plays studied in this and subsequent chapters is a woman. Griffiths never overtly calls herself a feminist playwright, but her concerns and focus become definitive and purposeful.

Beginning this second phase of her career with *The Darling Family*, Griffiths writes a play based on her lived experience and performs as SHE in the piece. The plot revolves around SHE and HE's conversational journey through an unplanned pregnancy. In *A Game of Inches* Griffiths plays Pamela, the solo character, who does not allow herself space in her own life. Inviting the audience into her home, Pamela aligns her self-discovery with a discussion of performance anxiety and baseball. Both this play and

Spiral Woman and the Dirty Theatre (1993) are once again equally important to Griffiths's career as well as to the history of Theatre Passe Muraille. Griffiths creates an atmosphere of baseball fever surrounding the production of *A Game of Inches*, which runs as a benefit for the theatre. Her next play, *Spiral Woman and the Dirty Theatre*, features in Theatre Passe Muraille's 25th anniversary season. Griffiths in each play returns to the fundamental aspects of creating theatre through herself and her experiences, which recalibrates her artistic focus and methods of creation.

Archival traces of the creation process for these plays demonstrate Griffiths's exploration of process and form as well as of her connection with the audience. In this chapter I articulate three foundational and interconnected aspects of Griffiths's theatrical creations: her role as actor-playwright, the process she uses to develop her art, and the form of the final product. She plays with variations on each of these facets of her artistry and truly begins to create her own theatre during the 1990s. Just so, *The Darling Family* is a fictional piece, but archival traces reveal its roots in the real. By considering drafts of the script in development I argue that as Griffiths navigates her connection to the audience and steps into the play as actor rather than remaining just writer, she develops a nuanced, powerful script by transforming her lived experience into fiction. *A Game of Inches* is an inconspicuous but very important piece in Griffiths's canon, the first since *Maggie & Pierre* that she returns to the solo form. Moreover, she immerses herself in a process that involves creating through improvisational sessions with Sandra Balcovske, which allows Griffiths to cultivate a continual exploration of her connection with the

audience as well as feminist concerns of gender essentialism and power dynamics between men and women. Finally, as Trish in *Spiral Woman and the Dirty Theatre*, Griffiths fictionally recounts the truculent and uncertain times surrounding the 1984 remount of *O.D. on Paradise*. Although *Spiral Woman and the Dirty Theatre* lacks the markers of transparent self-creation, as actor-playwright Griffiths tells her own theatre stories through Trish's mystical entrapment. Her creation process continues to vary based on the piece, but with these three plays she returns to the fundamental aspects of creating theatre through herself and her experiences in order to recalibrate her artistic focus and methods of creation. Overall, each character's journey connects with Griffiths's return to solo works and to the first solo-authored works of her career. She relies on herself, on her improvisation, on her innate instinct for creation, and on her powerful presence in performance.

With Chapters 1 and 2 focusing on the creative process and the intertwining of Griffiths's work with the history and development of Theatre Passe Muraille, the following two chapters observe what she goes on to create having embraced her identity and developed her own methods and processes. In Chapter 3 I argue that Griffiths enacts change within her work and begins to reconsider women's representation on the stage. I focus on articulating the "something that must be going on" with the plays she has written that are "inspired by real people" (Griffiths, "Thief" 301). In both *The Duchess a.k.a. Wallis Simpson* (1998) and *Alien Creature: A Visitation from Gwendolyn MacEwen* (1999) Griffiths writes and performs the titular character, creating autobiography on the

stage through her actor-playwright self. In the former, Wallis Simpson is vilified by the royal family and the public after her marriage to Edward VIII leads to his abdication, but has returned to declare: “But in the end, I won” (Griffiths, “Duchess” 243). In the latter, Canadian poet Gwendolyn MacEwen appears as an otherworldly figure to speak directly to the audience about her life, her poetry, and the transcendent purpose of art. A magical essence develops in these performances in how they are incredibly theatrical rather than biographical. By embracing the ephemeral nature of theatre Griffiths investigates women who are public figures by enabling the central character to speak her own self-representation.

Griffiths chooses to create and embody both characters, Simpson and MacEwen, whose stories re-examine history and provide new perspectives on the life and the minds of these women. In *The Duchess* I read Griffiths’s creation of fantastical history on stage as a form of auto/biography that reconsiders historical truth. The frame of this play develops a rich bifurcated world in performance that consists of historical reality and Faerie land. She returns to the fundamental elements of creating autobiography on the stage and reimagines the historically based source material in order to unsettle assumptions about women’s representation in general and for Wallis in particular. While existing scholarship on *Alien Creature* notices the oscillating nature of the self-representation, none delves into the specifics. Using archival traces and information from Layne Coleman I discuss how Griffiths creates her own self as an artist in each performance of *Alien Creature* through her embodiment of Gwendolyn MacEwen. The

potentiality of art to create beyond its material existence becomes a core component of Gwendolyn's monologue as she performs magic tricks. Griffiths enacts MacEwen's varying selves created by her art to reify the poet as well as to perform the essence of her own artistic practice. The play is illusory, but Griffiths is resolute that her connection with the audience is real; I argue that the selves of these two artists intertwine to magically perform the tangible importance of art.

Age of Arousal comes at the end of a successful career as the pinnacle of Griffiths's writerly creations. Having discovered and embraced her own ambition as well as the empowerment to be herself as an artist Griffiths combines these elements and uses them as a leaping off point to reveal the chaotic, complicated, and undefinable nature of womanhood in this "contemporary play set in the past" (Griffiths, "Playwright's Note" 18). Set in 1885, this play encompasses the historical period of the suffrage movement. Griffiths refuses the censorship of women historically and on the stage by developing her own theatrical device, which she calls *thoughtspeak*. The development of *thoughtspeak* epitomizes Griffiths's reliance upon discovery in process. She writes this play through the lived experience of her women characters, of which there are five—and one man. In doing so she imagines new ways to voice women's experience on the stage. She specifies that these *thoughtspeak* utterances voice thought that would otherwise be elided into subtext.

Griffiths continually experiments with theatrical form, relying upon her innate understanding of the audience to push the limits of theatrical representation. In *Age of*

Arousal I argue that she makes the characters' thoughts, spoken in "wild uncensored outpourings," an integral part of the play—literally making their private thoughts public (Griffiths, "Playwright's Note" 18). She takes as her foundation George Gissing's Victorian novel, *The Odd Women*, but reinvents the depiction of his women characters. In creating *thoughtspeak* Griffiths ensures the entirety of these women's experiences are visible and audible rather than dampened or censored. Ultimately, her play counters the presumptions placed upon women to remain quiet and confined in private spaces. Griffiths explores the representation of women's history as the characters wrestle with an insidious, often-unspoken, element of gender inequality that psychologists have termed benevolent sexism. Tracing Griffiths's consideration of the interrelated presumptions placed upon her women characters I argue that Griffiths's interrogations reverberate with the audience's contemporary understanding of womanhood as they recognize similarities between their lives and the lived experiences of these fictional characters. In all of these interwoven elements Griffiths creates a theatrical experience that reimagines the personal lives of first-wave feminists in order to revision the creation of women's history on the stage and, in the recognition of their experiences, to re-cognize how "[w]omen demand rights" and their perception of the continuing fight for equality" (Griffiths, "Age of Arousal" 26).

I argue in *The Theatre of Linda Griffiths* that through her reliance upon discovery in process Griffiths unsettles and reframes women's representation to address, oppose, and reimagine the presumptions placed upon women. As Mary and Rhoda teach other

women how to type in *Age of Arousal*, the gesture of writing becomes a metaphoric representation of the powerful potentialities inherent in women teaching other women to realize their potential. Throughout her career Griffiths's plays include a central figure that creates herself on stage with each performance. Griffiths transforms her own perspective and lived experience into fiction, and in doing so her presence remains in each play. Yet, reproducing history or creating auto/biography is not Griffiths's intention. She wildly imagines possibilities available to women through ephemeral, empowering moments of theatre. She ultimately creates in *thoughtspeak* a theatrical device that is a new way to speak a woman's voice on stage, unencumbered. I argue that throughout her career we witness her theatre transcend its ephemeral moment through the history of Theatre Passe Muraille, its community, their successes, and the dramas. Reproducing the real is never her intention; it is so much more. She represents the arc of a Canadian playwright who finds her home at Theatre Passe Muraille and uses her innate talent to connect with her audience and create meaningful, galvanizing theatre.

Linda Griffiths in Canadian Theatre

Linda Griffiths begins working on and for the stage in the early 1970s, having been interested in theatre from a young age. In an interview with actor-playwright Andrew Moodie for Theatre Museum Canada's "Legend Library," we learn that Griffiths's "mother is a Maclean from Cape Breton" who moved to Montreal where she met

Griffiths's father, a man from working-class northern England, who was posted in the Royal Canadian Airforce in New York with stops in Montréal. Griffiths speaks of her parents as a vivacious couple, "both talkers . . . both liked dancing, they were both really humourous life-filled, vital people." The family settled in the north of the city and eventually moved to a home in the early suburb development of the "west island." Griffiths describes her hometown as "a total anglo archive with the French world of Quebec at this strange distance . . . very odd" despite which she "still think[s] there's something of the Quebecer in [her]." This environment on the divide between city and nature and in close proximity to farmland, moulded her: "our street was the last street and afterwards was fields and a little wood." Her memories of building treehouses and forts in the forest, rafts that would not float, and climbing trees with a book in her teeth juxtapose a feeling of frustration "at an early age with the lack of a cultural world." As a result, she would "skip school and go to the Montreal art museum . . . always trying to get downtown."

Griffiths tells Moodie how she was drawn to performance even in her early years: "I was the kid with the puppet show in the backyard. Sometimes when I'm handing out flyers for something I think 'Oh God I've been doing this since I was eight,' 'come one come all!'" She recalls acting in her "first one-person piece" as an elderly woman killing a mouse and concludes: "Always there. Always there. Anything to do with performance I was there. I was in the drama club . . . I wrote plays for the kids that I took care of at this

park.” From childhood, performing “was a visceral need whatever the base of that need was. It was something that [she] eventually had to do”.^{13/14}

According to her long-time friend, companion, and fellow theatre practitioner Layne Coleman: “Her story is of someone knowing what they wanted to do from a very early age and then doing it with absolute joy” (Coleman, *Linda Griffiths* - 3). Pursuing formal education yet unsure about how to declare her intention to develop a career in acting, Griffiths first attends a CÉGEP in Québec, with a double major in History and Theatre at Dawson College. “It encouraged me because there were other people in that class . . . who were auditioning for theatre schools. And it made me audition for the National Theatre School without telling my parents because it was wild, the idea that you would get it. You know? It’s still like that,” she tells Moodie. At the same time, she also creates shows, that “without realizing it I did want to initiate projects, but to me that was being an actor.”

Griffiths applies to the National Theatre School of Canada (NTS) in the acting stream. Her June 8, 1972 acceptance letter from Joy Coghill, Artistic Director of the English Acting Course, reads: “I am delighted to offer you a place in next year’s acting

¹³ All of this biographical information is from Andrew Moodie’s interview of Linda Griffiths for Theatre Museum Canada’s Legend Library series (Griffiths, *On Growing Up*).

¹⁴ Layne Coleman in Zoom and email conversation tells me details of Griffiths’s childhood. He explains, “When I speak about her family it is not because I want to expose her in any way, it is because I think it is essential to understanding her work” (Coleman, *Linda Reviewed*). While this study is certainly not a biography, I believe his sentiment to be accurate and explicative of Griffiths’s reasoning behind speaking about her family with Moodie. As Coleman tells me, “what she was able to accomplish was a direct consequence of being the daughter of a war bride and a RAF pilot, a war hero” (*Linda Reviewed*).

class” (Coghill). The NTS receives Griffiths’s confirmation to attend the nation’s esteemed institute to begin on September 9th, 1972 (Griffiths, *NTS Registration Form*).^{15/16}

Griffiths tells Moodie about working for a small theatre company during the summer between studying at CÉGEP and her year at the NTS. Traces in her *fonds* confirm that in the early 1970s Griffiths begins participating in various companies and performances across Canada as an actor. Griffiths receives attention in a newspaper in 1971 as an actor, perhaps her first, for playing a serpent tempting Eve with forbidden fruit. Bill Stockwell’s article, “Drama Group Creates ‘Eden’ for Young W.I. Parkgoers,” specifies this performance “based on the biblical tale” is done “by a young West Island theatrical group operating under the federal government’s Opportunities for Youth program” (3). A black and white grainy photo accompanies the article in which three actors surround a kneeling Eve. Standing to the tempted’s left is a tempter, unmistakably Griffiths with long, dark hair, intensely immersed in the role while holding invisible fruit in her outstretched palm. She pursues this passion for acting at the NTS, but she does not thrive in its environment.

Griffiths refers to her time at the National Theatre School throughout her career.

“The physical aspects of the theatre school felt violent to me. . .no one grabbed my mind

¹⁵ Unless otherwise noted the quotations from Griffiths are once again taken from her interview for the Legend Library series (Griffiths, *On CÉGEP and NTS*).

¹⁶ My thanks to Jean Stutsman, Director of Development at the National Theatre School of Canada, for making these two documents available to me (Stutsman).

with a vision of what this was about. And so I just thought it was awful. And I didn't understand that I wasn't doing well. I didn't understand that I kind of disappeared" (Griffiths, *On CÉGEP and NTS*). The reduction of her body becomes representative of her discomfort with the environment, her thin figure in an outfit of black leotard and black tights garnering the nickname "Licorice" (Griffiths, *On CÉGEP and NTS*). At the end of her first year she is not asked back for another year of training.

Archival traces reveal that in the following summer of 1973 Griffiths works as a member of Bezumba Theatre. Funded by another Opportunities for Youth grant, these women perform without charging their audience.¹⁷ Among the files containing reviews of her work in the 1970s, Griffiths includes *The Moncton Transcript* mentioning eight women who comprise the Bezumba Theatre troupe that "aims to make woman aware of their situation." Griffiths explains: "We want you to look into your own life...are you doing this action because you've been taught to do it; because you are a woman and that's part of your sex-typing, or is it because you really want to do it. . . . If you really want to be a housewife, then that's fine. But if you're stuck in it because society assumes you're supposed to do these things...then, just think about it" (Robb 15).

After her time at the National Theatre School and this following summer spent acting, Griffiths returns to Dawson College, this time for teacher training. Griffiths says:

¹⁷ The support Canadian theatre and many arts initiatives receive from OFY and LIP grants in the 1970s has been oft-considered in existing studies. See Pasquill (1974) and McKinnie (2003) for two perspectives regarding the impact of such funding on theatre, specifically (Pasquill; McKinnie, "The Myth").

“After getting kicked out [of the NTS], and that was a special piece of nineteen-year-old pain, I then went to teacher’s college. . . . You did a one-year training program, and after that, if you taught two years out of the next five, you were allowed to teach elementary school. Well, I took the course and never taught at all” (Griffiths and Gallagher 115). In hindsight, Griffiths is thankful that no one hires her to teach, although she admits to a lacklustre search for employment in this field (Griffiths, *On CÉGEP and NTS*). Griffiths concludes her origin story with an autobiographical, mythical image: “I went for a long walk in the rain on St Laurent Boulevard and told myself that no matter how bad I was, I had to act and I would find some place that would take me. I started working in theatre then and never stopped” (Griffiths and Gallagher 115). Likewise, she tells Moodie:

I had to figure out what to do. And I had this red velvet cape I used to wear. . . . It was raining and I remember I walked what must have been the length of the St Laurent trying to decide what to do. . . . At the end I decided that I had to act. . . . I had an idea: I would go anywhere that I could go. And I would work at the local diner and make whatever money that there was so I could act. And that was the decision. . . . I had to do this thing. (*On CÉGEP and NTS*).

She succeeds in finding a paid position at Youtheatre in Montreal, “a really good children’s theatre group”; touring with them becomes “a passage out of defeat” for Griffiths (Griffiths, *On Touring*). During this time she works in various productions with Youtheatre as well as Montreal Theatre Lab. “Oh, it was so much fun,” she tells Moodie,

emphasizing the importance of finding comradery with fellow theatre artists (Griffiths, *On Touring*). On a CV from 1979 Griffiths lists her roles as the The Genie in *Aladdin* directed by Wayne Fines at Youtheatre in January 1975 and Lichin/Baphomet in *Seven Ways to Cross a River* directed by Alex Hausvater in February 1975 at Montreal Theatre Lab (Griffiths, *Resume 1979* 3).¹⁸ About this work with Hausvater, Griffiths tells Andrew Moodie that in her mind “the images are still there . . . [of] beautiful masks,” which inspires some of her work on *Jessica* (Griffiths, *On Saskatoon and Thompson*). While Griffiths does not start to find her voice as a creator until working in collective creation, these early moments importantly begin her journey in Montreal, 1975, with her earliest work in the theatre beginning in 1971.

Hitherto unacknowledged in studies of Griffiths’s career is her long-time friend, collaborator, coworker, and romantic companion Layne Coleman. Griffiths and Coleman meet while working on the Montreal theatre scene. Coleman leaves to join Saskatoon’s 25th Street House Theatre at its earliest stages of conception. Artistic Director Andras Tahn writes the titular character of *Billy the Kid* tailored to him.¹⁹ Later, “Coleman’s girlfriend came out from Montreal and a role was written into the play for her, as an

¹⁸ Hausvater says in an article published in *Jeu*, “À cette époque, tout le monde était très nationaliste; tout devait être québécoise ou canadien. Même à ce moment, vers 1978, je ne crois pas qu’il existait un véritable public de théâtres anglophone” (Glorioso et al. 151). Indeed, he forms Montreal Theatre Lab as an anglophone company in Montreal with a goal of creating “typiquement montréalais” theatre while avoiding the defence of English language in the region (Glorioso et al. 151).

¹⁹ Coleman is already involved with 25th Street Theatre by this time. His first performance with the company is in *Covent Garden* after he and Andras Tahn “had met in a coffee house” (Brenna 40). It plays on the 30th of March, 1973 (Makahonuk 3).

historically non-existent girlfriend to Billy the Kid” (Kerr 18). Indeed, Coleman and Griffiths are romantically involved which leads to her relocation, but he tells me, “I gave her opportunities in Saskatoon which she turned into theatrical gold” (Coleman, *Linda Reviewed*). Griffiths travels to Saskatoon and performs in Andras Tahn’s adaptation of *The Ballad of Billy the Kid* as Angela Maxwell. The piece runs from April 10-20 in 1975 (Brenna 52).²⁰ Griffiths is a young actor with truncated training, innate talent, and a powerful determination to perform.²¹ Coleman helps Griffiths find her first theatrical community at a time when new voices in Canadian theatre are searching for ways to write about local and national subjects.

Existing overviews of Griffiths’s career mention her participation in early collective creation with Paul Thompson when he travels to 25th Street House Theatre in Saskatoon. Shelley Scott, for example, writes in her review of *Sheer Nerve: Seven Plays*, “it is unfortunate that there is no introduction” and goes on to propose a list of potential avenues for considering Griffiths’s work:

Linda Griffiths’s career as an actor, writer, and director encompasses many of the important movements in Canadian theatre which could be discussed: her

²⁰ Kerr details in the chronology of development for *Paper Wheat*, “[Layne] Coleman’s girlfriend came out from Montreal and a role was written into the play for her . . . That was Linda Griffiths who added so much energy to the first production of *Paper Wheat*” (Kerr 18-19).

²¹ Coleman recalls their living circumstances as incredibly minimal, at one time they rent “a renovated hallway of an apartment building,” at another “a garage during a winter of 30 below weather,” and he makes it clear that for Griffiths “nothing was deprivation . . . as long as she was acting. She only had one dream and that was to act. There was no one with a will like her” (*Linda Griffiths* - 3).

early work with 25th Street House Theatre in Saskatoon; her close association with Paul Thompson’s collective-creation process and the evolution of Theatre Passe Muraille; her place in feminist theatre and contribution to the development of Native theatre; interesting cross-overs between television, radio, and film; and the exploration of the tension between Canadian culture and an American career. (“Sheer Nerve [Book Review]” 84)²²

Editor Jacqueline Petropoulos remarks in the introduction to a new essay collection, *Linda Griffiths* (2018), that Griffiths as a theatre practitioner “made her mark early on, becoming part of the burgeoning alternative theatre scene at the age of twenty-one when she joined the newly established 25th Street Theatre in Saskatoon. . . . [S]he worked on some of the most iconic plays of the period, which launched a new era of Canadian drama devoted to nationalist content” (“Celebrating” 1).²³

Griffiths’s roots are entrenched in Canadian theatre, more specifically in collective creation and the alternative theatre movement. She calls this period of time her education: “all of a sudden I was inventing stuff when I thought all I wanted to do was be a kind of dreamy Ophelia or dreamy Juliet, I wasn’t doing that at all” (Griffiths, *On Saskatoon and Thompson*). She recalls her introduction into this method of “[m]aking up

²² *Sheer Nerve: Seven Plays* is a collection of Griffiths’s plays published by Blizzard Publishing in 1999 that includes *Maggie & Pierre*, *O.D. on Paradise*, *Jessica*, *The Darling Family: A Duet for Three*, *A Game of Inches*, *Brother Andre’s Heart*, and *The Duchess*, a.k.a. *Wallis Simpson* (Griffiths, *Sheer Nerve: Seven Plays*).

²³ Petropoulos’s anthology, which came out a few years after Griffiths’s death, solidifies Griffiths’s contribution to Canadian theatre and her status as an important playwright from this period. However, it should be corrected that Griffiths does not participate in *The West Show* (Petropoulos, “Celebrating” 1).

a play on your feet” and the questions that emerge through the process of “what the hell do you say? . . . What do you do? We had no idea” (Griffiths, *On Saskatoon and Thompson*). Diane Bessai in *Playwrights of Collective Creation* defines this type of theatre as “actor-improvised plays, created during the rehearsal period, in which theatrical rather than literary values predominate” (13).

Theatre Passe Muraille under Paul Thompson’s directorship champions a Canadian configuration of a theatre form that is often purposefully “subversive[]—like their contemporary American and British counterparts—demystifying the gentilities of ‘high art’ by sharing their themes and performance processes openly with the audience” (14). They become well known in Canada beginning in the early-1970s and take a “typical structure” of “a collage of juxtaposed scenes rather than a strictly linear development, comprising dramatic sketch, monologue, song and expressive gesture. The actors perform multiple roles, sometimes portraying inanimate objects as well as people. Through speech and transformational body language, the actors provide the essentials of the scene without much use of props and sets” (14). The translation of the company’s title, Theatre Beyond Walls, demonstrates that shows can be performed anywhere because their purpose is to create their own audiences.²⁴

²⁴ The most well-known of these pieces is *The Farm Show*, which premieres in a barn to the farming community on which it is based. A note in the text specifies: “All the characters in this play are nonfictional. Any resemblance to living people is purely intentional” (Theatre Passe Muraille, *The Farm Show: A Collective Creation* 15). Michael Ondaatje films “The Clinton Special,” a documentary about this collective creation (Ondaatje).

After watching the actors from Theatre Passe Muraille improvise in the mornings what would become *The West Show*, Thompson works with 25th Street House Theatre in the afternoons to create their own collective creation.²⁵ Griffiths believes his methods “grounded that dreamy part of [her]” (Griffiths, *On Saskatoon and Thompson*). This first collective creation becomes *If You Are So Good, Why Are You in Saskatoon?* in which “Griffiths create[s] Bev, the disaffected reporter for a university newspaper” (Bessai 218). These personal memories and recollections of artistic development depict her participation in this movement. Griffiths begins working with Thompson in 1975. The sociohistorical context of the alternative theatre movement both roots and complicates the study of her career.

“Alternate theatre,” “alternative theatre,” and “alternates” are among the terms used to describe the activity of nationalist play making and playwrighting in this country, which was at its most popular and successful in the 1970s. As varied as these terms are, the history of how Canadian theatre develops during this time period equally differs depending on the individual depicting the history or telling the story. Since the history of this movement has been outlined and investigated so thoroughly elsewhere this introduction simply provides a contextualization for the beginning of Griffiths’s career.

²⁵ Griffiths recalls being invited to watch the experienced group improvise: “The atmosphere was very grumpy in the room. . . . [I]n the middle of this room was a little statue of two people, older than middle age, staring ahead . . . and his company was circling around this sculpture. And all of a sudden Ted Johns starts. Then Anne Anglin goes to the fore.” And when she describes her character’s imagined braid Griffiths is in awe, “she just transmogrified in front of us” (Griffiths, *On Saskatoon and Thompson*).

Initially, a group of not-for-profit theatres are created that define themselves as alternative to the regional theatre system.²⁶ Each of these theatres start in the late 1960s and early 1970s with different mandates. Most develop nationalistic content and oppose the emphasis of enticing “professional companies from abroad” rather than developing or encouraging Canadian talent (Rubin 180). Griffiths aligns herself with collective creation, works well with Paul Thompson, and maintains a career-long dedication to Theatre Passe Muraille. Therefore, at the time Griffiths develops as an actor Canadian theatre is markedly nationalistic, meaning she trains and grows during a time when Canadian content and the employment of Canadian scripts, writers, actors, and so forth is promoted.²⁷

This movement in Canada has been framed and defined in what is now considered a more traditional viewpoint exemplified by Renate Usmiani in *Second Stage: The Alternative Theatre Movement in Canada* (1983) and Denis Johnston’s *Up the Mainstream: The Rise of Toronto’s Alternative Theatre* (1991). Usmiani defines

²⁶ This group of theatres is instituted after the Massey Report is released in 1951. In *The Muses, the Masses, and the Massey Commission*, Paul Litt identifies “a key passage” in which “the report went on to argue that cultural development was an absolute requirement—indeed, a duty—of the national state” (211). The most notable change occurring as a result of this report is the creation of the Canadian Council for the Arts. For theatre, it also instigates the creation of the regional theatre system across the country.

²⁷ See historical materials such as Rubin’s collection entitled *Canadian Theatre History: Selected Readings*, Filewod’s *Performing Canada: The Nation Enacted in the Imagined Theatre* and *Collective Encounters: Documentary Theatre in English Canada*, R. B. Parker and Cynthia Zimmerman’s “Theatre and Drama, 1972-1984” in *Literary History of Canada*, and Wasserman’s “Introduction” to *Modern Canadian Plays*.

alternative movements as theatre that “sets [itself] up in opposition to institutions and social patterns as well as artistic conventions” shifting the philosophical leanings from “the play itself as a work of art to the audience and its involvement in the theatrical process. It is this reciprocal/communicative aspect which is seen as the central function of theatre by alternative companies” (Usmiani 1).²⁸ Other features of alternative theatre she discusses include working with little or no funding, tending towards revolutionary ideologies, as well as preferring techniques without hierarchical structures such as collective creation and improvisation (Usmiani 2). Finally, to the Canadian context she adds a final piece of the definition, that “alternative theatre here is definitely nationalistic. Its emphasis on original works and the need to support Canadian playwrights continues a strong protest against the cultural implementation, at last, of the demand made already in the 1940s by Gratien Gélinas, when he called for a ‘national and popular’ theatre” (Usmiani 2).²⁹

²⁸ Here Usmiani speaks about the movement internationally. Bennett in *Theatre Audiences* also considers this movement internationally and notes that “[t]he expansion of performance art and theory (which has devalued language/texts in favour of the event), as well as of contemporary oppositional drama, has, however, changed the emphasis of dramatic theories since the 1970s” (Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* 8). Although my focus must remain on Griffiths, it is important to understand that the movement’s implications across nations and fields is far-reaching.

²⁹ Sherrill Grace’s *On the Art of Being Canadian* succinctly discusses this history. Indeed, there are troupes who tour Canada in the early 1900s, declining in the 1920s. The “little theatre” movement grows between the two world wars and there is a support for Canadian work by the Dominion Drama Festival. Professional theatre companies, some of which are transformed into the regional theatre system, begin to be established in the 1950s. Don Rubin’s edited collection of seminal essays, *Canadian Theatre History: Selected Readings*, also contains many pieces which touch on these and other moments in the development of theatre in Canada.

Various players within the alternative theatre movement in Canada develop and establish their work, method, philosophy, and company, each one emphasizes these concerns in different ways. Where Theatre Passe Muraille relies upon Thompson's methods to create 'theatre without walls', other companies such as Tarragon Theatre and Factory Theatre Lab focus on developing Canadian talent through playwrighting and producing these plays.³⁰ Toronto Free Theatre, meanwhile, proposes cultural accessibility and, as cofounder Martin Kinch explains, "we wanted to develop a relationship between actor, director and playwright" (Johnston 171). Denis Johnston writes about the history of specific theatres in Toronto, dedicating a chapter, or in the case of Theatre Passe Muraille two chapters, to each of these four theatres. In the first chapter he also discusses Toronto Workshop Productions, arguing for its place as "a precedent rather than a model, an inspiration mainly in the sense of being a durable company founded and maintained on anti-mainstream principles" (Johnston 22–23). Johnston writes that these companies participate in the alternative theatre movement in various ways, each counters regional theatre but does so with a focus on creating Canadian work by, for, and about Canadians. Bessai concurs, "The goal of the 'alternative' theatres which develop in the late 1960s may be divided roughly into two categories: those concentrating on the development of new playwrights—for example, Tarragon Theatre and Factory Theatre Lab in Toronto—

³⁰ Factory Theatre Lab is now known as Factory Theatre, quickly dropping the designation of "Lab."

and those working in collective creation” (13). These methods are used to oppose the funded regional theatres that rely upon imported British and American dramas and talent.

I would go as far as noting that two distinct historiographies have been written on this period. The first generation initially writes the history of alternative theatre, which the second generation later reconsiders. What later scholars oppose are the original’s gaps and oversights, pointing to the necessity of further nuance and attention to inequalities within the movement. For example, in the “Introduction” to her edited collection *Theatre and Performance in Toronto*, Laura Levin argues that Usmiani’s book exemplifies in many ways the traditional arguments within the study of the alternative theatre movement (viii). She identifies three primary plot points, “First, [Usmiani] cites Toronto as the mythical origin of Canadian theatre. . . . Second, she seeks to define theatre’s alternative stance through three familiar tropes. . . . Third, she identifies a set of influential figures and companies to anchor this history” (viii). This narrative often ends with “the ‘mainstreaming’ of alternative theatre and their eventual coming of age (through owning property)” (ix). She goes on to define this collection, published in 2011, over twenty years after Filewod’s 1989 article, as embracing his counter argument and considering how previous studies of “the alternative/mainstream binary” omit “other forms of differences that structure Toronto Theatre” (ix).³¹

³¹ Levin writes, “While this critical narrative fostered many emerging Toronto theatre artists, and is still taught at many universities today, this collection offers alternatives to the ‘alternative story’ by putting it into dialogue with other historiographies that expose its blindspots” (ix). This dissertation acknowledges the two poles of critical argument, but

Alan Filewod argues in his 1989 article, “Erasing Historical Difference: The Alternative Orthodoxy in Canadian theatre” published in *Theatre Journal*, that the use of alternative and mainstream as contrasting definitions has served its purpose, is no longer productive and, as the title suggests, erases historical difference between these very different theatres and companies in both the regional and alternative divisions. He does so by looking at various theatres across Canada that have been placed into two categories of this alternative/mainstream binary (“Erasing” 204). He also exposes the oversights of the movement, arguing that this “paradigm progresses with no explicit references to class or audience” and identifies gender considerations as missing from the philosophies of the central figures of this narrative (“Erasing” 202). Levin along with others have pointed to the emphatic call to create “indigenous” drama, “one that would free Canadians from the tyranny of Euro-American culture,” but this term “often effects a troubling erasure of the Toronto’s *other* Indigenous past. . . . Toronto has been a site of Aboriginal performance for many thousands of years [sic]” (ix).³²

Insight to Griffiths’s perspective from within the alternative theatre movement is gleaned from multiple interviews:

necessarily attends to Griffiths’s place within this binary, yet another on which her career is established.

³² Levin here discusses Jill Carter’s “Decolonizing the *Gathering Place: Chocolate Woman* Dreams a *Gathering House* in Toronto,” which is included in this collection (Carter). Indigenous theatre in Toronto and across Turtle Island has continued to grow and develop since the publication of this collection in 2011. Yvette Nolan’s *Medicine Shows: Indigenous Performance Culture* (2015) is a significant and pivotal publication (Nolan, *Medicine Shows: Indigenous Performance Culture*). I consider Nolan’s work in Chapter 1 with *The Book of Jessica* (1989).

The goal is to help to create a culture. And your loyalty is to that culture that you're helping to create. And I think that one of the things that is lost now is the important element that theatre had to do with, to use the cliché, 'telling our own stories', and these things become clichés and the wrong people always say them. . . . [T]here were conversations that went down about how there shouldn't be Canadian theatre yet, we shouldn't be creating Canadian theatre. We had to learn more and study the classics before we would be ready to take on the enormous element of creating our own theatre. . . . And people forget that. (Griffiths, *On Creation*).³³

Griffiths's insider experience of the opposition that Canadian theatre practitioners such as herself receive for their apparent lack of education and training while nonetheless creating distinctively Canadian drama provides perspective into the moment of creation and recalls their struggle to resist such criticism. Her lived experiences expand the wider scholarly debate through the lens of one participant in the movement at a particular time.

Griffiths's presence within the alternative theatre movement interacts with this history and with the unquestionable gender inequalities in Canadian theatre over the entire course of her career. Although Rina Fraticelli's *The Status of Women in the*

³³ Paul Thompson of Theatre Passe Muraille comments in an interview published in 1982 his perception of the dichotomy in Canadian theatre from the perspective of receiving federal funding, that "although we may be mainstream in that we are the real spokesperson for the country, in terms of economics we're still alternate" (Wallace and Thompson 239). The alternative theatre movement and its various ideologies are quite complex and depend upon the varying perspectives of participants as well as on which matter is being discussed.

Canadian Theatre prepared for the Status of Women Canada has not been published, Fraticelli discusses her findings in journal articles that appear in 1982 and 1983 (Fraticelli, “Invisibility Factor”; Fraticelli, “Any”).³⁴ Fraticelli finds that “of 1156 theatre productions staged between 1978 and 1981 across Canada, only 10% were written by women,” 77% by men, and the remaining 15% of plays are by collectives (Fraticelli, “Invisibility Factor” 114; Zimmerman, *Playwrighting Women: Female Voices in English Canada* 19). When Griffiths begins to transition into playwrighting she is very much a minority.

Although these statistics have over time improved a troubling disparity continues to this day. In a study of “1,945 productions staged between 2000/01 and 2004/05” Rebecca Burton discovered 27% were written by women, 68% by men, “and collective creations (involving men and women) accounted for 4% of the productions” (14). The “Playwrights Guild of Canada’s annual Theatre Production Survey for 2013/14 found that of the 812 productions, 22% were written by women, 63% by men, “and 15% by mixed gender partnerships” (MacArthur 7). Emma Stenning in the beginning of Soulepper Theatre’s “Six Women Writing” panel on March 8, 2021 says that upon announcing this program “only 31% of staged plays were by women and less than .5% by trans and non-binary writers. More recent stats show that 34% of plays produced in theatre companies across Canada are now written by women and 1% by trans and non-

³⁴ In “Women in Theatre: Here, There, Everywhere, and Nowhere” (2006) co-authors Rebecca Burton and Reina Green argue that “the report itself was marginalized, falling on deaf ears in both the theatre community and the mainstream, and remaining unpublished to this day (60).

binary playwrights. So there's been slow progress, but ultimately the industry is still dominated by men" (Soulpepper Theatre Company, *Six Women Writing*).³⁵ While the inequity is no longer a dismal ratio of 1 in 10 plays by women, the increasing trend has stagnated since the early 2000s at fluctuating rates so that now 1 in 3 to 1 in 4 produced plays on Canadian stages are written by women, who may or may not be Canadian.

In "Why We Don't Write," published in 1985, Canadian playwright Margaret Hollingsworth addresses a question she often receives in interviews: "'where are the women playwrights?'" (374). Thirty years later, in 2015, the first section of the introduction to a report on gender in the performance industry in Canada is subtitled "Where are all the women?" (MacArthur 10). Researchers in the various studies cited above note that despite the inequities prevalent for women as playwrights, directors, or theatre Artistic Directors, women are better represented in other areas of the field, such as backstage and front-of-house. To me, based on these statistics, it becomes even more important that the women who do get produced and establish a career in these uneven circumstances receive acclaim. Moreover, from my position as a scholar I believe women such as Griffiths require more scholarly attention. The answer to the questions posed by Hollingsworth and MacArthur requires nuance and can take many forms depending on how one decides to answer and if the statistics cited pertain to playwrights, theatre company management, front of house, and so forth. Cynthia Zimmerman identifies in

³⁵ Through this program six women playwrights have each been commissioned to create a new work: Trey Anthony, Sandra Caldwell, Falen Johnson, Hannah Moscovitch, Kat Sandler, and Erin Shields (Soulpepper Theatre Company, *Soulpepper Supporting Top Women*).

1994 an aspect of this inequality specific to theatre, “the added complication of the interdependent nature of the art. So the fact that the process is overwhelmingly male-controlled becomes critical. . . . One might add that since it is very rare for unproduced scripts to get into print, male theatre directors inadvertently determine whether a work vanished from history” (20). These issues, therefore, also impact who gets produced, who gets published, and who becomes part of the history of Canadian theatre. These varied sources, all produced by women, address the inequality in Canadian theatre.

Another concern pertains to lack of critical attention on the women who have had lengthy and/or impactful careers, although some scholars of Canadian theatre have taken on this work. Zimmerman in *Playwrighting Women: Female Voices in English Canada* (1994), the first book-length study to focus on women playwrights in Canada, posits that “[t]he sudden call for scripts” due to the search for Canadian voices and talent in the 1970s “made it possible for a number of women who were already part of the alternate theatre community to ‘seize the time’” (17). Shelley Scott in *Nightwood Theatre: A Woman’s Work Is Always Done* (2010) studies the history of this feminist theatre company, “contextualizing Nightwood in terms of feminist theory and history,” since it was founded in 1979 and remains active (*Nightwood Theatre: A Woman’s Work Is Always Done* 11). Therefore, it must be acknowledged that a complexity of the early alternative theatre movement is that it both provides opportunities to women while remaining dominated by men holding positions of power in theatre companies, as was the case in all the arts in the 1970s. The introduction of these concerns of gender equity and

gender-specific theatre groups leads to the further establishment of more diverse theatres in a wave after the alternates.³⁶

Susan Bennett in “Feminist (Theatre) Historiography/Canadian (Feminist) Theatre: A Reading of Some Practices and Theories” (1992) traces scholarly considerations of the titular concerns. The punctuation of the title intimates her findings, that there remains a separation between feminist/Canadian/theatre, a sense of feminism, “to take up Lynda Hart’s observation about feminist theatre in general, [as] ‘cordoned off’” (“Feminist (Theatre) Historiography” 146). Bennett’s observation greatly impacts this study of Griffiths’s work: “Yet, if Canadian theatre history has yet to pay sufficient attention to the diversity of work by women and particularly to work named as ‘feminist’, one trait can be celebrated. Our journals are, in comparison to their American and British counterparts, far more accessible to the *makers* of theatre” (“Feminist (Theatre) Historiography” 149). She queries whether this inclusion of women theatre practitioners reveals an openness to listening to their voices or if it more insidiously indicates “that not enough academics take an interest in feminist theatre work” (149). Her considerations land upon the conclusion that this work requires coverage and, in fact, that there is so much to be done that both theatre practitioners and theatre scholars must both partake in the work. Bennett, in her 1992 temporal context, notes: “We will work hard at this task, although probably not quickly enough” (149).

³⁶ Zimmerman differentiates, “the generation of playwrights that [her] study focuses on were part of the alternative scene of the early seventies rather than the fringe aesthetic that emerged later” (21).

Because Griffiths often wrote about her work and creative process this dissertation takes up Susan Bennett's call regarding practices and theories of feminist historiography in the study of Canadian theatre: "No longer should we construct historiographies which exclude the makers of theatre from participation" (149). However, because Griffiths began working during the 1970s within the alternative movement, she also puts existing academic historiographies in conversation with the perspectives of theatre practitioners (Bennett, "Feminist (Theatre) Historiography" 149). Martin Julien in his "Introduction" to *Theatre Passe Muraille: A Collective History* that he edits with Samantha Serles and Rae Johnson chronicles that the book "plan [Andy McKim] had hatched in collaboration with former artistic directors Paul Thompson and Layne Coleman, as well as Playwrights Canada Press publisher Annie Gibson and managing editor Blake Sproule" (Julien ix). Griffiths receives consistent mention as an integral member of Theatre Passe Muraille. Julien also delineates the "desire and challenge" of the collective "to create a document that would reflect all the messiness, aspiration, conflict, transcendence, innovation, success, and failure that were absolutely constituent to Passe Muraille's entire social and artistic history. Not a definitive journal of record, sequential history, or consolidated theorization of meaning, but—like the theatre itself—a spun-out and bracing compendium of trial and error" (ix). What this method creates is the history of Theatre Passe Muraille told from various viewpoints, successful in a way akin to the collective creation model. Moreover, this method achieves a textual record without

flattening any of the contradictions and complexities inherent in the endeavour. These goals are ones I, too, aspire to in this dissertation.

Ultimately, Griffiths's career demonstrates that some women during the 1970s are indeed given space to create and perform, although they remain the minority as a gender. As Zimmerman discusses in *Playwrighting Women*, "The early opportunities for this 'minority' came in different guises" (18).³⁷ Griffiths does not step away from the collective creation process as quickly as Bolt; her first collaborative play premieres in 1980, but she does not write a solo piece until 1991.³⁸ Nonetheless, she does find her own voice thanks to experience gained with Thompson and through her extensive experience on Canadian stages. Indeed, alternate perspectives to this history of the alternative theatre movement, and women's continuously excluded role from Canadian stages during this time, demonstrates what Hadfield argues: "Like the gaps and spaces in historical narrative made visible by postmodernism, the mainstreaming of the alternate theatres made visible the gaps and spaces in identity politics, spaces that feminist theatre practitioners, like feminist historians, were poised to exploit" (34). The way scholars

³⁷ This observation is made after quoting Carol Bolt: "Sharon Pollock once said in an interview we were doing together that in a way, we were both really lucky because when we started writing, theatres could produce our plays and get both a Canadian and a woman in their season in one shot! So we were a minority, but it didn't necessary [sic] work against us. That was part of our charm" (Zimmerman 18).

³⁸ Curiously, 1980 also sees the premiere of plays by other women playwrights who are or go on to be prominent, including Sharon Pollock with *Blood Relations*, Judith Thompson's *The Crackwalker*, and Margaret Hollingsworth's *Ever Loving*, all of which are discussed in *Playwrighting Women* (Zimmerman, *Playwrighting Women: Female Voices in English Canada*).

shape our study of theatre history impacts how they fit into this narrative of alternative theatre in Canada.

It is very important to recognize that the women who participate in the alternative theatre movement have not been silent; they provide varying perspectives on this critical moment when women are able, in ways, to influence the field from within; women who fight for “room to grow,” in Griffiths’s words (Griffiths and Gallagher 117).³⁹ In fact, in “I Am a Thief...Not Necessarily Honourable Either” (2006) Griffiths articulates her belief: “What we were doing in the collective creations was physically and vocally creating characters for the theatre. A visceral, not a literary process” (Griffiths, “Thief” 303–04). She concludes “I think this is why collective creations are so misunderstood in academic circles” (304). This point emphasizes what Susan Bennett proposes in 1992: “We need to foster a relationship, an interaction between the history of practice and the practice of history, to encourage a collaboratively-produced ‘expertise’. With feminists on both the maker and recorder sides of the equation, we should surely be able to assist in each other’s struggle” (Bennett, “Feminist (Theatre) Historiography” 149).

³⁹ For example, Janet Amos’s “Rural Roots: A Theatre Memoir” published in *Canadian Theatre Review* is quite striking: “The theatre has always been a part of my life. I had my first drama lessons with Dora Mavor Moore at the New Play Society in Toronto” (9). In fact, in an article published in 1984 on events in Canadian theatre, including the scandal that surrounds *O.D. on Paradise*, see Chapter 1, Ray Conlogue notes: “The appointment of Janet Amos as artistic director of Theatre New Brunswick is a rare instance of a woman being named to run a major theatre, and is a welcome puncturing of the male ethos that permeates the theatre in Canada” (Conlogue, “Teapot Tempest Strikes Paradise” 22). Likewise, Griffiths speaks of the work women such as Amos and Anne Anglin had done, having “been at Thompson for years to get him to find a way in the sessions to let them in, to acknowledge that while the boys were being so incredibly great, there was another part of things that had to be given room to grow” (Griffiths and Gallagher 117).

“With *Maggie and Pierre* (1980),” writes Roberta Barker in the “General Editor’s Preface” to *Linda Griffiths*, “Griffiths seemed to crystallize a whole, heady era within a few movements on stage” (ix). Yet, those who write about the early years of this movement do not give Griffiths the same acclaim, often attributing her success to Thompson or minimalizing this touchstone piece. In fact, histories written on alternative theatre in Canada often make mention of Griffiths as a supporting character in the movement. For example, Johnson writes “In [Thompson’s] later work with actress-playwright Linda Griffiths, culminating in such as plays as *Maggie and Pierre* (1979) and *Jessica* (1982; rev. 1986), the improvisations were performed by the playwright herself rehearsing under Thompson’s direction” (117). He also depicts an important outcome of Thompson’s work at 25th Street House Theatre being the “new infusion of actors and writers to the extended family of Theatre Passe Muraille, notably Linda Griffiths and Layne Coleman” (130). Usmiani similarly claims, “In relation to the myth-making aspirations of Passe-Muraille, *Maggie and Pierre*, a minor, but extraordinarily successful show of 1979 deserves mention” (63). When discussing the function of the three characters in Griffiths’s one-person show she concludes, “Griffiths’s little play is definitely a contribution to the Trudeau legend and an attempt to elevate Margaret also to the level of a folk heroine” (63-64). The very dismissive tone of these mentions aligns with historical representations that have been accused of depicting the “heroes” of the alternative theatre movement “a[s] manly men,” a focus which has left less outspoken

participants forgotten (Levin x).⁴⁰ Regardless, Griffiths's contributions to Canadian theatre merit the attention I give to her plays. This dissertation intends to reposition her in the field.

Scholars writing from the perspective of alternative theatre as mythologized likewise paint Griffiths into a larger piece of history. Amanda Hale makes a pointed revelation about the narrative of alternative theatre, that “[d]espite the dismal statistics of Fraticelli’s 1982 report . . . there have been the exceptions: women who developed as playwrights and directors concurrently with the development of alternate theatre, and others who have since benefitted from the context it established,” she lists Griffiths as

⁴⁰ For example, *Linda Griffiths* begins with Petropoulos’s “Giving Women Centre Stage: Celebrating the Life and Work of Linda Griffiths,” but the epigraph is Thompson’s remarks on Griffiths. Likewise, Coleman’s powerful “Linda Did Not Want to Be a Boy, but She Wanted Their Stage Time” (141) concludes the collection, but the first chapter of the book once again is Thompson’s “The Road to Becoming a Writer” (14). I find Thompson’s piece sometimes tends towards belittlement, for example, “It’s strange that with all the later obsessions she had with diet and health, my memory has Linda and Karen Wiens going drink for drink with the ‘boys’; there was never a bottle saved for another evening” (15). Although Thompson addresses his role in *Jessica*, “the buildup for *Jessica* was more like six [years]. To be fair though, Linda was only involved in the last two” (18). He goes on to discuss his early interactions with Campbell and the decision to cast Griffiths, a white actor, to play the Métis titular role. “Maria didn’t act, and we could find no Indigenous actor drawn to the challenge of playing her. Anne Anglin considered it but didn’t think she could live in the complex world of this story. The choice fell to Linda, and the challenges of the play *Jessica* have their own book” (18). I discuss *The Book of Jessica* in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, but even here Thompson’s evasive phrasing, “The choice fell to Linda,” seems to be a piece of knowledge never to be uncovered (18). It may be a piece of archival detritus (dirt) which resides on the tapes between Campbell and Griffiths, yet when I met Campbell in 2018 she declined speaking with me about *Jessica*. We were in the post-performance moments of a night of Native Earth’s Weesageechak Begins to Dance festival; my request was for a discussion at another time. Therefore, I analyze the materials available, but also feel strongly that Campbell’s continuing work is what should be focused on rather than this troubled piece from the 1980s; Griffiths says the same of her own canon (see Chapter 1).

one such woman (45). Alan Filewod in “‘Supercharged Reality’: Documentary and Theatrical Disciplinarity” (2016) writes:

Outside of Toronto, we can trace the influence of Paul Thompson, who was extending his reach into Alberta, seeding new companies in Alberta and Saskatchewan. This was the season of TPM’s *The West Show* and 25th Street Theatre’s *If You’re So Good, Why Are You In Saskatoon?*, which introduced the young Linda Griffiths to documentary performance and set her on the road to *Maggie and Pierre* (1980) and subsequent distinction as a playwright. (Filewod, “Supercharged” 189)⁴¹

McKinnie in *City Stages: Theatre and Urban Space in a Global City* (2007), for example, discusses Griffiths amongst a list of other well-known personalities “from Passe Muraille’s first decade” who participate in “programming” during the 1990s that “increasingly recalled its early and most famous collective creations” (*City Stages* 88). Finally, Anne Nothof’s “Canadian Drama: Performing Communities” in *The Cambridge History of Canadian Literature* (2009) mentions Griffiths. Specifically, Nothof writes about “Linda Griffiths’s *Maggie and Pierre*,” which appears in a paragraph on the “guidance” provided by Paul Thompson to Theatre Passe Muraille; also attributed to

⁴¹ Filewod specifies in *Collective Encounters: Documentary Theatre in English Canada* (1987) that his “analysis of these plays rest on the critical assumption that the documentary theatre must be considered a genre of performance rather than a form of literary drama” (Filewod, *Collective Encounters* ix). A very distinct argument, he discusses the history of such theatre in Canada, which “introduced dramatic techniques that would later recur in documentary theatre” such as *Paper Wheat*, receiving attention in a chapter of Filewod’s study (Filewod, *Collective Encounters* 6). I do not engage with this text because it distinctly contradicts Griffiths’ viewpoint. She does not continue participation in the later stages of this collective.

Thompson is Carol Bolt's *Buffalo Jump* and *Billy Bishop Goes to War* ("Canadian Drama: Performing Communities" 405).⁴² These views of Griffiths's career importantly include her in this historical moment while minimizing her importance. She cannot only be defined within this history and within the tradition of collective creation.

Griffiths does begin her life in theatre working in collectives and largely with Thompson. Zimmerman in her introduction to *Playwriting Women* mentions Griffiths as a creator who is "highly skilled at the technique called 'jamming' and writing on one's feet" who only after "participating in about ten collectives" turns to more traditional playwrighting; but Griffiths does not garner the attention of a chapter in this book because at the time of writing she had only written one solo piece and was otherwise known for collective and collaborative work (19). Diane Bessai focuses a chapter of *Playwrights of Collective Creation* (1992) on Griffiths in which she argues: "Among the several playmakers who began working with collectives and who have since become playwrights in their own right—Ted Johns, Cindy Cowan, Sharon Stearns, for example—her [Griffiths's] work most consistently reflects the collective process: in the genesis and development of its subject matter, or in its completed form, or in both" (217). Bessai focuses on *Maggie & Pierre*, *O.D. on Paradise*, and *Jessica* while also discussing Griffiths's participation in the collective creations (220-242). She creates a chronology of Griffiths's career beginning with *The Ballad of Billy the Kid* and considers *If You Are So*

⁴² *Maggie & Pierre* receives the description of "an irreverent portrait of Prime Minister Trudeau's marriage" (Nothof, "Canadian Drama: Performing Communities" 405).

Good, Why Are You in Saskatoon?, *Paper Wheat*, *Generation and ½* (218–19).⁴³ Griffiths subsequently travels to Montreal in the summer of 1979 to participate in “Paul Thompson’s collective project . . . *Les maudits anglaise*, with writer Gary Geddes” (219–220). Bessai concludes her section on Griffiths’s involvement in these collectives by noting that “[l]ike Thompson, she was always interested in developing the collective creation in new directions” (220). Just so, as Griffiths continues to explore her voice and identity as actor-playwright she creates varied pieces using incredibly different processes.

Other scholars have written journal articles on certain pieces by Griffiths, comparing her plays to one another or to the work of another playwright. The first, Mary Jane Miller’s “*Billy Bishop Goes to War* and *Maggie and Pierre: A Matched Set*,” appears in 1989, just before *The Book of Jessica* begins to receive scholarly attention. Miller compares the two collaboratively written plays by individuals deeply involved with collective creation.⁴⁴ Decades later, Susan Bennett (2003) recasts *Maggie & Pierre* as a piece amongst Griffiths’s plays about real women and in her tendency towards “life-performing” by considering it alongside *The Duchess* and *Alien Creature* (“Performing Lives” 26). Kym Bird’s “Linda Griffiths’ Gendered Family” appears in *Canadian Theatre Review* in 1991, considering *The Darling Family*, which Shelley Scott revisits in

⁴³ Bessai’s thorough chapter is the only other resource I found that notes Griffiths’s involvement in *The Ballad of Billy the Kid* as Angela (218). I owe Bessai’s meticulous research a great debt as it provides this first detail, along with Zimmerman’s mention of Griffiths’s participation in many collective creations, to indicate that Griffiths’s early career is comprised of more than just her work with Thompson.

⁴⁴ Of course, Griffiths and Thompson collaborate on *Maggie & Pierre*. *Billy Bishop Goes to War* is created by John Gray and Eric Peterson.

“Bodies, Form and Nature: Three Canadian Plays and Reproductive Choices in the 1990s.” Bird finds Griffiths’s investigation of abortion lacking in sensitivity to gender equality. Finally, Katherine McLeod’s “(Un)Covering the Mirror: Performative Reflections in Linda Griffiths’s *Alien Creature: A Visitation from Gwendolyn MacEwen* and Wendy Lill’s *The Occupation of Heather Rose*” is published in 2006 and again in *Solo Performance* (2010). These articles and Bessai’s chapter form a small body of work on Griffiths’s canon and do give some attention to her most produced and popular plays.

The only play from Griffiths’s canon that received extensive attention is *Jessica*, along with the larger *The Book of Jessica*. These texts are created with a method akin to collective creation and in collaboration with Métis creator Maria Campbell, whose life story forms the foundation of this fictional piece. Beginning in the early 1990s with mention in Barbara Godard’s “The Politics of Representation: Some Native Canadian Women Writers,” *The Book of Jessica* has been the subject of almost twenty journal articles and book chapters between 1990 and 2018.

Because appropriation in the text was becoming a hot topic in Canadian literature in the early- to mid-1990s, at least one piece on *The Book of Jessica* appears yearly during this period, sometimes two or more articles in the same year. Daniel MacIvor, with the benefit of hindsight in 2018, notes the naïveté of the project, “It was another time, but still a foolish idea, though innocent. Linda felt Maria’s story was too important not to tell. At the book launch in Toronto wounds of appropriation were still fresh. There was a very public dressing down of Linda, in front of an audience. She felt it deeply and

wore it without protest” (“Who Is She?” 82). *The Book of Jessica*, Griffiths’s role as Jessica, and specifically her identity as a settler-descendant who collaborates with Maria Campbell, a Cree-Métis woman, is the focus of most of the scholarship on the project albeit through various critical lenses.⁴⁵

Overall, the majority of this critical attention on Griffiths’s career has been either about this troublesome text or written with a foundation of this playwright’s relationship to collective creation, particularly her work with and for Paul Thompson. While these are defining aspects of Griffiths’s career, there are other moments that equally become part of her identity as a creator and impact her future endeavours. This dissertation, therefore, perceives Griffiths’s career and her incredible oeuvre as occupying “yes, and” territory. Yes, she is mentored by Thompson, and she becomes a playwright in her own right. Yes, she began during the alternative theatre movement, is defiantly nationalistic, and she does not remain defined by these throughout her career. Yes, she consistently focusses on process, to which her self-archiving of decades of process materials attest, and she purposefully seeks to publish her products. Yes, she becomes a playwright who works on her own and writes traditionally, and she maintains a connection with her actor-self throughout her career.

⁴⁵ Most recently Maria Campbell has been working on a collaborative project, “Tapwewin: Her Inquiry,” that both responds to and suggests the shortcomings of the report on the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls inquiry. According to co-collaborator Yvette Nolan, “Maria’s got the vision of where we’re all going . . . and I’m sort of the dramaturge and also writing things to glue us together. It’s very much an Indigenous process for Indigenous women” (Fricker).

Critical attention on Griffiths's career has been relatively modest and her work has been on the edge of vanishing, although it has been made more visible thanks to recent posthumous attention (2018) from editor Jacqueline Petropoulos and the contributors to *Linda Griffiths*. As Roberta Barker recounts, after her "untimely death in 2014, many members of the Canadian theatre community remembered her disappointment at the comparative lack of scholarly attention on her work" (ix). "Though under-represented in scholarly publications to date, Griffiths's career richly deserves book-length coverage," argues Barker who concludes that "Griffiths both invites and merits [this] close critical attention" (ix). This collection features essays from scholars as well as theatre practitioners; although an extensive list of plays are discussed, the scholarship focuses on her later hits without considering her early collective and collaborative work, some of which has fallen out of print.

Therefore, looking at the body of critical attention Griffiths's pieces received alongside the mentions of her time in alternative theatre it becomes apparent that despite her decades-long career she has been engulfed by history. An interesting position for a woman, it is not that she has been left out or erased, but instead her individual merit has been subsumed by a larger historical narrative. While this dissertation does not endeavour to rewrite these histories, the sociohistorical context is critical to the positioning of Griffiths's career both in her perspective and in existing scholarship on this playwright. Moreover, her presence on Canadian stages holds an important spot in Canadian theatre history as a woman playwright who achieves success and notoriety despite the unequal

gender representation in theatre across Canada. Finally, that her plays are already falling out of print is a concerning outcome for many playwrights in this country.

In taking on the study of Griffiths's career my aim is to recognize, to appreciate, and ultimately to reposition her importance to theatre in Canada. *The Theatre of Griffiths* closely analyzes Griffiths's work, which is interwoven with the relevance of hitherto unstudied archival material. My original research broadens and deepens the appreciation of her work and her talent, including the contexts of her connections and influences. I argue that throughout her career Linda Griffiths made a major difference to emerging Canadian theatre and to the representation of women on the stage. *The Theatre of Linda Griffiths* belatedly expands awareness of the legacy she has gifted to us. Linda Griffiths: the Queen, Ophelia, and Lady Guinevere of alternate theatre.

Chapter 1

Transformations: Griffiths's Actor-Playwright Identity

[S]truggle of man, woman, patriotism, power, corruption, vision, motherhood, fatherhood, changing relationships, etc.

—Linda Griffiths, on *Maggie & Pierre* (Rudakoff 15)

In the 1970s Griffiths learns how to generate theatre through her body, but ultimately does so as an equal member in a group with the purpose of script production. During this next phase of her career, which spans the entirety of the 1980s, Griffiths collaboratively creates/writes three plays, *Maggie & Pierre* (1980, with Paul Thompson), *O.D. on Paradise* (1983, with Patrick Brymer), and *Jessica: A Theatrical Transformation* (1986, with Maria Campbell). These three plays comprise this stage of Linda Griffiths's career and are impressively varied in terms of their process, form, and subject matter. My purpose in this chapter is to analyze each play as a stand-alone piece, but while doing so to trace the differences, similarities, and through-lines that begin to form while Griffiths transitions from an actor in collective creations into a playwright in a more traditional sense. Relying upon a combination of writing as well as improvisational and collaborative creation, Linda Griffiths plays with making theatre as she transitions between being an actor and becoming an actor-playwright.

Grappling with this duality between actor and playwright, Griffiths asks, during an interview with Judith Rudakoff, "I am a writer: so why isn't this process easier? Why

isn't it any more fun? Any time I say I'm either an actor or a writer I feel like I'm lying" (14). Speaking from the temporal context of the end of this stage in her career, it is clear these questions are centre stage in her recollection of the past decade. When asked about the possibility of being both, Griffiths articulates two sides of herself that are somehow in contradiction during this phase of her career, perhaps even in competition. She expresses her constitution, "one part [is] this imaginary woman writer: the linear mind," the other part happy to "just bec[o]me one of the actors" (15).

Just so, along with the differences between the textual products of her creative endeavours emerges three methods of creation and three distinct variations of Griffiths's own relationship with the performance of her written script. *Maggie & Pierre* is created through improvised sessions which are later sculpted into a text. *O.D. on Paradise* begins not with Griffith as an actor, but with she and Patrick Brymer writing an early piece which is expanded into a play text. Finally, *Jessica* is initiated as an improvisational collective project. Over the course of the extensive period of creation it undergoes drastic changes, the final version realized with conversations between Griffiths and Campbell then edited through Griffiths's writerly process. As she plays with these methods of creation, Griffiths also moves between her roles of actor and playwright. She remains both while creating *Maggie & Pierre* since she relies so heavily upon her improvisational acting skills to create the script and plays all three characters in performance. In contrast, the process of *O.D. on Paradise* entails a volte-face as she and Brymer write 17 pages which they bring to Clarke Rogers and expand with the help of his dramaturgical

expertise, with Griffiths not acting in the Theatre Passe Muraille premiere (1983) or the remount (1984).⁴⁶ Finally, *Jessica*'s process occurs concurrently with Griffiths's other work of the 1980s and the creative methods advance alongside her development during this period. It begins as a piece of collective creation with Griffiths to play the main character, transitions into a script production with Griffiths improvising while Thompson and Campbell watch and comment, and finally transforms into the version that remains today after Griffiths the playwright takes revisions on solo and does not perform in the premiere of the new script (1986). As Griffiths undergoes these transformations within the dualities of actor/playwright and improvisational creator/writer she similarly examines each subject with a kaleidoscopic lens, as her statement that serves as epigraph to this chapter demonstrates.

1.1 *Maggie & Pierre*: Solo Performance, Collaborative Writing

Maggie & Pierre, characteristic of all Griffiths's plays, is a dense text whose multifocal nature impacts its significance and any attempts at analysis. This play at the beginning of Griffiths's career marks her emergence from being an actor in a collective group to standing on her own as a performer and collaborative writer. She also creates this script through her body, guided and mentored by Paul Thompson, yet begins to develop her

⁴⁶ She does, however, play Joan in the 1982 premiere at 25th Street House Theatre, which I address further in section 2.2.

own artistic method of intertwining research, improvisation, and writing. Although Griffiths steps into new territory, she maintains connection to her roots in collective creation by researching the subjects and relying upon her own perspective to write about the Trudeaus' life and time in the spotlight of Canadian politics. The playwright's point of view remains visible in the development of each character, which clearly demonstrates this play's connections to collective creation in both form and content. Indeed, even the play's choice of subject—a Canadian Prime Minister and his wife—directly correlates with the alternative theatre movement's myth-making objectives. And yet, listing Maggie before Pierre in the title signals Griffiths's early commitment to focusing on women characters. She brings Maggie's private struggles into public view and counters popular perceptions of this oft-critiqued figure. Additionally, Griffiths focuses equally on Maggie's individual story and her mythological qualities as she does on the Prime Minister's journey. Taking these elements of the text into account, her process of creating and performing *Maggie & Pierre* importantly sees Griffiths's transition between actor and playwright during which she begins to explore and express her own concerns within her foundational education in collective creation.

Maggie & Pierre theatricalizes the Canadian political drama that was the relationship of Pierre Elliott Trudeau and his wife Margaret Trudeau née Sinclair. The first act develops the characterization of each title character and the dynamics of their relationship, including Henry—a third-wheel journalist watching and commenting on the Trudeaus' relationship—and Henry's opinions and his role in their lives. Henry

represents and encapsulates the Canadian voyeurism of Pierre and Margaret's volatile marriage and its eventual demise. The first half of the play ends with Maggie "danc[ing] wildly" at the Governor General's Ball then directly addressing the audience, "I'd like to tell you how much I look forward to seeing you again in the near future" (Griffiths and Thompson, "M&P" 21).⁴⁷ Breaking the illusion of separation between the audience and the characters effectively and swiftly removes any sense of this play being entirely historical or documentary. When the audience returns to their seats after the intermission the action begins much differently from that of the first act, with Maggie and Pierre having philosophical debates about "*the ways of the world*" and pitting diametrically opposed politics against one another (Griffiths and Thompson, "M&P" 22). The second act builds on the personal developments of the first by introducing these political and philosophical debates into their relationship. Ultimately, as happened historically, their marriage implodes.

The character excluded from the title begins the play. This first scene, "Henry Doesn't Want To," starts with his adamant denial of continuing to write about the Trudeaus: "Absolutely not. That's my final word. I'm not writing about those two any longer" (Griffiths and Thompson, "M&P" 10). In fact, the conversation that leads to the creation of this play begins on a similar note. While Griffiths works on the collective creation *Les maudits Anglais* she perpetually enters improvisational sessions with "this

⁴⁷ Unless stated otherwise all quotations from *Maggie & Pierre* are from *Sheer Nerve*, the collection of Griffiths's plays published in 1999.

Pierre Trudeau character” (Griffiths, “Process?” 58). She bluntly describes Thompson’s methods of dealing with Griffiths’s obsession: “probably to shut me up, [he] said, ‘You should do a one-person show and play both of them’. . . . I said I didn’t want to do a one-person show, and six months later we were rehearsing” (Griffiths, “Process?” 58). The 2013 “Production History of *Maggie and Pierre*” from Playwrights Canada Press’s publication of this play (with *The Duchess*,) begins with the same tale: “Thompson says, ‘That’s your one-person show, you do both of them,’ Griffiths says she doesn’t want to do a one-person show” (Griffiths, “Production History of *Maggie and Pierre*” 20).⁴⁸ Just as plays created through collective creation methods rely upon research and upon the actor’s point of view as the motor propelling creation, *Maggie & Pierre* begins with Henry expressing Griffiths’s experience within the first lines, the first word of the play being “No” (Griffiths and Thompson, “M&P” 10). Ultimately, Henry asks, “who’s going to do it but me?” and he capitulates, as Griffiths did: “All right, I’ll do it, but my way. What I saw. What I see” (Griffiths and Thompson, “M&P” 11). Within this first scene of *Maggie & Pierre* the play is positioned within the realm of fiction as a story being written from the playwright/actor’s point of view, narrated by a fictional journalist, and with its roots in collective creation remaining visible.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ This spelling, *Maggie and Pierre*, is used in the 2013 publication of the play, but not in the earlier versions or Griffiths’s edited collection, *Sheer Nerve*. For this reason I use *Maggie & Pierre* throughout this study.

⁴⁹ In this chapter I refer to Griffiths as actor/playwright to parallel the description of her artistic identity with my argument about the impending discovery of her actor-playwright identity.

Maggie & Pierre is created through improvisational sessions in 1979, with Linda Griffiths performing and creating while Paul Thompson watches and helps to revise as well as organize a script. When the time comes for a workshop production, this play requires “a two-level set with a ladder backstage, Rolling Stones songs for the transitions, and thirteen quick [costume] changes” in the small Backspace of Theatre Passe Muraille (Griffiths, “Production History of *Maggie and Pierre*” 20–21). The first preview of this demanding one-person show occurs on the 30 November 1979. It opens on Valentine’s Day, 14 February 1980, in the Mainspace of Theatre Passe Muraille with Linda Griffiths playing Henry, Margaret, and Pierre (listed in this order in both the Talonbooks and Blizzard Press publications), directed by Paul Thompson, with set and costume design by Paul Kelman, and lighting design by Jim Plaxton (Griffiths and Thompson, *Maggie & Pierre* 5). Paul Thompson’s “Production Notes,” which concludes the 1980 version of *Maggie & Pierre*, emphasizes the integral nature of these backstage members of the production as well as the importance of Al Higbee’s role with the audio component of the show (Griffiths and Thompson, *Maggie & Pierre* 99). He also includes Myles Warren as stage manager and credits Judith Rudakoff, Myles Warren, and Kit Dawson as aiding with “Initial Script Preparation” (Griffiths and Thompson, *Maggie & Pierre* 99). Each of these roles, and Thompson’s expansion of the initial production credits, gives prominence to the collaborative nature of the production, reminding the reader that the front cover’s attribution of authorship to “Linda Griffiths with Paul Thompson” comes nowhere near the team this play requires for production. At the same time, when Griffiths writes about

the process of this play in 1998 she emphasizes how the improvisation sessions are preformed with notes and “some ideas” that contradict what collective creation was known for: “I wanted the show to be pretty; I was sick of farm stuff and wooden cut-outs” (Griffiths, “Process?” 58). These elements of the premiere demonstrate the intertwining nature of this script’s connection to collective creation while also starting Griffiths’s move towards working solo.

At the same time, this script’s form bears resemblance to those created through collective creation. Such scripts, created by using these methods, are often comprised of two acts. The first act introduces the characters, plot, and in the common occurrence of the subject being historically based, the production relies upon a theatrical form and uses music to accompany the performance. The second act of pieces created through collective creation tend to turn towards more complex, serious themes emphasized by a reduction of performative elements. Relying upon her skills learnt in this form, Griffiths creates *Maggie & Pierre* through improvisational sessions that rely upon her research. Griffiths’s play combines factual retellings of publicized moments of Maggie and Pierre’s life with fictional vignettes and invented scenes based on moments that had been reported in the media. Its structure therefore has similar features to the collective pieces on which she spent the previous decade collaborating.

Griffiths initially seeks out “anyone that had an opinion,” recording conversations with people in downtown Toronto about their perceptions of the Trudeau’s. Griffiths also speaks with their friends, journalists, and reads books about this Canadian political

couple, simultaneously investigating “Canadian politics and the media” more broadly (Griffiths and Thompson, *Maggie & Pierre* 7–8). A thorough researcher, Griffiths goes to Ottawa three times to explore archival material and conduct other investigations. The final time she achieves a monumental coup: “I talked my way into the cocktail party circuit and went to the Governor-General’s Ball. It was there I was able to meet Pierre Trudeau” (Griffiths and Thompson, *Maggie & Pierre* 8). She writes about this encounter in “The Lover: Dancing with Trudeau,” an article included in the “Trudeau’s Impact” section of *Trudeau’s Shadow: The Life and Legacy of Pierre Elliott Trudeau*. In an interview with Andrew Moodie, Griffiths expounds, “If research is the tenant of collective creations, if you always ground what you do in the real person, the real situation, the real landscape, the real accent, the real whatever, then this was an incredible coup to get to Trudeau and thereby be bound to him and also to experience him” (Griffiths, *On M&P* 2/2). Collective creation requires research, but it is Griffiths’s expansive use of these methods as well as her individual tenacity and thoroughness that take her to Ottawa.

This moment in Griffiths’s research has a profound impact on the play in two ways. Firstly, it becomes the basis for Maggie and Pierre’s dance in “Grouse Mountain” (Griffiths and Thompson, “M&P” 16). Secondly, Griffiths’s research impacts *Maggie & Pierre* because of the responsibility and connection she forms with these characters. In the initial publication of *Maggie & Pierre* Griffiths writes, about the Ball, “It was there I was able to meet Pierre Trudeau, but that’s a long story” (Griffiths and Thompson,

Maggie & Pierre 8). Years later, she begins her article about dancing with Trudeau by discussing the context of their encounter, research for *Maggie & Pierre*, and quickly states, “But this is not a story about the play. It’s a personal story I tell in the hope that, by pursuing the microcosm of my encounter, a piece of the macrocosm will emerge” (Griffiths, “Dancing” 37). The microcosm was captured in an image of Griffiths in a black lace dress wringing her hands and standing with Pierre Elliott Trudeau.⁵⁰

Despite asserting that the article is not about the play, her description of her encounter with Trudeau paints the same picture as Maggie’s “*date*” with Pierre both aesthetically and in their performed, imagined conversation (Griffiths and Thompson, “M&P” 16). Griffiths recalls travelling to Ottawa for the Ball with “a vintage black lace gown” in “a plastic bag” as well as her difficulty surrounding footwear because “for the poor, shoes are always a problem” (Griffiths, “Dancing” 39). Just so, in *Maggie & Pierre* “Grouse Mountain” begins with Maggie preparing for a date with Pierre; she asks herself “All this fuss, for what? . . . I gave up all this materialistic crap a long time ago, matching handbags, high-heeled . . . shoes” (16).⁵¹ Maggie then “*struggles with the dress*” and “*with it over her head*” describes it as “a viewfinder made of lace” (Griffiths and Thompson, “M&P” 16). Griffiths’s costume in *Maggie & Pierre* replicates the outfit she wears

⁵⁰ Getty Images, Credit: John Mahler, Toronto Star “Collection,” 10 Oct 1979 has the heading “CANADA-OCTOBER 10: Opposition leader Trudeau with Linda Griffiths; a Toronto Arts Researcher; who some have said is his new girlfriend; spend quite some time together. (Photo by John Mahler/Toronto Star via Getty Images)”

⁵¹ Throughout this dissertation I use “. . .” to refer to ellipses in the original and “. . .” as MLA requires to note when I omit from the original.

during the coup of dancing with Trudeau at the Governor General's Ball. The pause in performance with the shoes followed by the guileful gesture of holding up the dress in order to look through it makes direct reference to the intertwining of this, her perspective, with the creation of these two characters.

She playfully replicates these aspects of her true dance with Trudeau, but the play also contains her more personal thoughts and experiences. For example, Griffiths recalls her thoughts while dancing with Trudeau: "I could feel his body underneath the suit" that Maggie echoes "I can feel his body underneath the suit" (Griffiths, "Dancing" 43; "M&P" 17). Further, Maggie responds "I intimidate the Prime Minister of Canada!" when he tells her "You intimidate me when you laugh," just as Griffiths thought "I want to squeeze him and feel his muscles" just before he told her "You intimidate me when you laugh" (Griffiths and Thompson, "M&P" 17; Griffiths, "Dancing" 43). Finally, she describes being reminded "of being taught to dance by my father in our rec room, with my mother at the record player" while dancing with Trudeau (Griffiths, "Dancing" 43). Just so, in *Maggie & Pierre* his date and future wife tells him "Do you know what this reminds me of? One night . . . I went down to the rec room and my mother played the record player and my father taught me to dance. Dancing with you is like dancing with my father" ("M&P" 17). This transference of Griffiths's memories with her family associates the character with the creator on a more personal level, amplifying Maggie's characterization.

Griffiths's experiences, perspectives, and research frame and focus the play like a camera viewfinder. Griffiths explicates in her interview with Andrew Moodie: "Thinking through Maggie it was like dancing in a way that, you know, we didn't dance anymore. There was also the sense of the older, more traditional thing" (Griffiths, *On M&P 2/2*). Griffiths uses her research not only to create or to find a character to replicate on stage, but as an opportunity to see the world from her characters' eyes, also putting herself on stage. She tells Moodie: "I was responsible to them, I was responsible to him" (Griffiths, *On M&P 2/2*). Similarly, in "Dancing with Trudeau" she says:

As we danced, I began to take him in, to try to remember everything, but more than that, to see the world from inside his eyes. I tried to find his heartbeat and my own. I breathed him in. And I knew that, because of this, I was bound, as if to some unspoken pact with him, even though he knew nothing, to rise above any easy instincts I might have about portraying him. . . . I wouldn't go for the easy laughs. I would get the hard laughs, won from the inside. I was suddenly afraid. I felt responsible to him. (44)⁵²

Griffiths connects with Maggie and Pierre. As such, she creates the play from each person's point of view with a sense of responsibility in telling their story and vulnerably includes her own experiences. Ultimately, the script bears the unmistakable traces of

⁵² I explore this concept using Sherrill Grace's theory of a performed auto/biographical pact in Chapter 3.

collective creation, but Griffiths also marks the text with her own experiences embodied in performance.

Although she does not consider her work as biographical, Griffiths remains aware that she is writing and performing the life of real people. Yet, reviews of *Maggie & Pierre* consider the text as a biography and not as fiction created through viewpoint of Griffiths or Thompson. Gina Mallet, for example, wrote: “What turns out to be said on stage is rather less than could be read in a newspaper about their relationship. Why didn’t Griffiths use her imagination more and offer a fresh perspective?” (Mallet, “Political Satire Misses Its Mark” D8).⁵³ Contradictorily, Pierre Elliott Trudeau’s biographer, John English, in *Just Watch Me: The Life of Pierre Elliott Trudeau, 1968-2000* begins a discussion of the disintegration of the Trudeaus’ marriage by mentioning Griffiths’s play (309–10). He begins this chapter, entitled “Beyond Reason,” named after Margaret Trudeau’s 1979 tell-all autobiography, with a mention of *Maggie & Pierre*, doing so not for the purpose of considering its contents in relation to his biographical task. Instead, English uses this example of Trudeau’s life being theatricalized to state: “For Trudeau, public life was a stage, and his insatiable curiosity made him the most interested observer of all the plays” (310). Unfolding a discussion perpendicular to Mallet’s accusation,

⁵³ D.A. Hadfield describes Mallet as a woman who “remains one of the most dearly hated theatre critics Toronto has ever known, for her acerbic pronouncements on specific productions (especially her reputation for panning new Canadian work) as well as specific colleagues, and the unflagging elitist stance she adopted in her articulation of the artistic principles a ‘good’ critic must apply in the business of reviewing” (59). Some of Griffiths’s battle with Mallet is explored in Section 1.2, during my discussion of *O.D. on Paradise*.

English does not consider how the play represents Trudeau's life. He cites Griffiths's consideration of Maggie and Pierre as "'epic characters,' heroes in that they contain 'all the elements of humanity, magnified'" (310). Indeed, while this play may be considered to be "inspired" by their relationship, it is no biographical retelling (English 309). Just so, Susan Bennett expresses her interest in "not just the biographizing impulse of Griffiths's writing but, more specifically, her desire to bring these women (back) to life in her own embodied performance of her subjects" ("Performing Lives" 25–26). She discusses *Maggie & Pierre* in the context of Griffiths's canon, arguing that "in each case, the actor who realized these historical figures on stage in what have been generally and deservedly received as dramatic *tours de force*" and concluding that Griffiths's work "is not just life-writing, then, but life-performing" (Bennett 26). Although there are traces of biographical elements, Griffiths's methods and her exploration of an actor-playwright identity shift the focus of the text.

The process by which Griffiths creates *Maggie & Pierre* may resemble biography or documentary, but it also imaginatively transforms fact into fiction through theatrical alchemy. The 1980 publication of *Maggie & Pierre* is at this time subtitled "a fantasy of love, politics and the media" (3). Linda Griffiths details in the introduction her research methods which, in addition to those I have already discussed, involve everything from making scrapbooks and studying their contents, to watching and reading archival materials in the CTV film library, the National Archives in Ottawa, and the CBC library (8). Discussing her research tactics, she concludes that "The need to find out 'the truth'

became a theme of the play,” which muddles the boundary between the play’s fictional form and its subject as a nonfictional foundation (8). Perhaps it is difficult to definitively categorize this play because of a similar malleability of collective creations. Bessai considers this form “closest to documentary drama when they allude to their own discovery process,” a textual product in-between documentary and fiction (39). She believes, however, that “such plays become documentaries of the performers’ personal encounters with and re-invention of that factual material. This is the point at which myth-making begins” (39-40). Important to this debate about matters of historical truth, biography, and documentary is Griffiths’s inclusion of certain elements of factual and historical information in *Maggie & Pierre*. The two distinct poles of this quasi-docudrama, quasi-biography, and entirely fictional play are demonstrated perfectly by Griffiths’s repeated use of Pierre Trudeau’s notorious statement “Just watch me.”⁵⁴

In 1970, when Prime Minister Trudeau had enacted the War Measures Act as a result of the FLQ crisis, members of the media approached him as he walked between his car and Parliament. The video in the CBC archives features the ensuing conversation that focuses on his decision to rely upon military rather than police protection after the abduction of James Cross and Pierre Laporte (*CBC Archives*). Just so, in “October Crisis” during the second act of *Maggie & Pierre*, “HENRY catches PIERRE outside the Parliament Building. He and his tape recorder are worried about freedom” (23).

⁵⁴ For instance, this statement appeared on the first page of the *Globe and Mail* on 14 October 1970 in an article entitled “Ottawa is prepared to go any distance to stop FLQ, Trudeau says” (Burns 1).

Quotations from Trudeau’s interview comprise the majority of this scene. It is, therefore, an abridged but accurate retelling of this moment with little fiction found in the script while the solo form continues to demand suspension of disbelief from the audience. Griffiths replicates Trudeau’s playful tone, such as his response to the reporter’s obvious question about armed army personnel patrolling the streets, “Haven’t you noticed?” (23). Even though Trudeau begins the interaction smiling and engaged in a political debate he quickly turns many of the questions around: “Is it your position that we should give in to the seven demands of the FLQ?” and “Well, how can you protect everybody, without turning the place into a police state?” (23). This quotation is an amalgamation of a lengthier debate regarding accusations that Trudeau was encouraging a police state (*CBC Archives*). The scene ends with Trudeau’s infamous quote—the Prime Minister baldly replying “Just watch me!”—when Henry asks “How far are you willing to go with that?” (24). He became so well-known for this comment full of bravado and frustration that the title of one of his biographies is *Just Watch Me* (English).

Creating fiction from an historically significant moment Griffiths uses Trudeau’s infamous challenge to a reporter in the second scene of the play, but here the line is spoken by both Maggie and Pierre. At the end of their first conversation they simultaneously proclaim their aspirations: “I want to be world-renowned, to shape destiny, to be deliriously happy. You might say, I want it all” (Griffiths and Thompson, “M&P” 11). This scene is the first in the play when Trudeau speaks his famous line with Maggie’s grandiose dreams equaling his. Having spoken overtop one another, they

incredulously ask, “What did you say?” with Maggie replying: “You heard what I said. Do you mean it?” to which the future Prime Minister replies “Just watch me” (11). A clever moment becomes one of strength for Maggie as she responds, “No. Just watch me” (12). This scene centres around their first encounter on a beach in Tahiti that ignites their romance while also developing both characters. This familiar line of Trudeau’s develops his steadfastness and determined personality early-on in the play and quickly establishes his character within the realm of information widely known to the public. And yet, by having Maggie speak the same bold, powerful lines as him, concluding with Trudeau’s famous one, her characterization builds with identical strength and agency. Margaret Trudeau may have been best-known in the memory of Griffiths’s audiences for other events, but this playwright/performer develops her rendition of Maggie as a woman who holds her own with the future Prime Minister, who is his equal, and who ultimately “*exits, having won the day*” (12).

A stark contrast—between the two sides of this woman in her first solo scene, “17 Magazine” (13). This shift is clear as the vision of Maggie “*clad in a classic one-piece*” (11) is replaced with her “*pensive in her ‘good girl’ dress*” (13). These later stage directions continue: “*At first, she is removed, as if telling someone else’s story. Later she becomes more desperate to be where ‘it’s happening’*” (13). In this second scene with Maggie, an unseen and nebulous “VOICE” criticizes decisions she makes as she matures. With each critique she alters her behaviour, seemingly seeking approval by meeting external expectations. This scene develops a contrasting depiction of Maggie as a woman

driven by the opinion of others, broadly represented by this VOICE. For example, its first line triggers her to recall seeking the approval of her father by giving him his “pipe and slippers,” followed by sitting on “Mr. Jenkin’s lap” saying “I’m glad you think I’m pretty as a picture”, objectifying and sexualizing herself to meet outside expectations (13). The VOICE later accuses that “you’re not even a real hippie, you’re just thinking about what a pretty picture you make wandering around the trees” (14). Retaliating, she asks “First, what’s a real hippie? Second, yes, I am thinking about that, but I’m thinking on the inside too. You can be outside and inside at the same time, you know” (14). Despite her moment of strength, when the VOICE commands “Answer the telephone” Maggie speaks to her mom “Heyyy, get real, I don’t go out on dates anymore...Who? Pierre Trudeau? That’s for real!” (14). The scene depicts Maggie as a woman controlled by and conceding to external opinions, very much in contrast to her initial character development as equal with Pierre.

The theme of facing external expectations continues to grow as Maggie becomes a public figure and the audience watches her grapple with the increased attention and the opinions of others. Maggie, “*dress[ed] up again, but this time it is more natural to her*” goes to her “*first major social event as wife of the Prime Minister*” (20). She initially “*sees the possibility for evangelism in her new role,*” a stage direction that aligns with the initial impression of her character (20). As she speaks to figures such as Queen Elizabeth, Prince Charles, President Nixon, Fidel Castro, and Chairman Mao pieces of her conversations demonstrate her use of the opportunity to discuss her point of view.

Importantly, when asked about the prospect of having children Maggie quickly changes the subject, returning to her own objectives, “Oh, you know babies, they’ll come along when they want to come along... Yeah, yeah... Mr. Nixon, do you have any idea what you represent to the people of my generation? . . . You’re a symbol of evil, of corruption” (21). As the scene concludes her words become interspersed with “*rock music*” that crescendos each time it plays. Concurrently, Maggie becomes increasingly “*nervous and strained*” until she “*dances wildly, then recovers*” (21). The audience is left with this image of Maggie on edge after recovering from dancing. Her attempts at seeking freedom and change appear to have been thwarted. Through each moment of character development, Maggie is depicted as an opinionated and conflicted woman who has strong aspirations. She simultaneously seems to be hugely affected by presumptions placed upon her by others, which will ultimately prevail.

This aspect of Maggie’s character is further explored in the second act as she attempts to follow the trajectory expected of her position in society as the Prime Minister’s wife. However, we see her discomfort within these roles expand as she continues to exist within the constraints of having her private life part of the public culture of Canada. In “Walk Alone,” the second act’s third scene, Maggie, “at odds with the public gaze . . . finds peace not in the traditional domestic roles of wife and mother, but at the intersection of nature and excess” (Bennett 26-27). Susan Bennett here refers to Maggie’s choice of scenery. She goes for her walk in the rain “down by the river, where the sewage dumps in” that Maggie describes for her audience: “It looks like a waterfall”

(Griffiths and Thompson, “M&P” 24). This peculiar response to this place where nature becomes contaminated by pollution represents her “understanding that the hybridity of an uncomplicated natural life and an unpleasant but necessary public one is her reality—and that her challenge is to see the waterfall and not the contamination” (Bennett, “Performing Lives” 27). However, she has broken away from “*the guards who must accompany her*” to have this pensive moment alone that she ends by seeing “Someone new watching” herself: “It’s me watching me, down by the river, a monument of bad taste” (Griffiths and Thompson, “M&P” 25). Bennett cites Bessai’s argument that Maggie is ““coming to a tentative recognition of the split self” but ultimately concludes “all Maggie can see is a binary of ‘taste,’ that emphatic marker of public decorum, and judgement” (Bennett, “Performing Lives” 27). I agree, but also find great meaning in Maggie’s conclusion: “She wants me up there...She’s beckoning... (*Silently, she mouths the words...*) No way...” alongside the fact that she walks in the rain without protection (Griffiths and Thompson, “M&P” 25). She remains steadfast in enjoying herself, even if others cannot understand. At this moment Maggie breaks away from the expectations placed upon her by so many, by being in the public gaze. She recognizes these two sides of herself, feels the weight of judgement, but in this struggle between the previously pure, unrestrained flowing of nature and the less appealing aspects of her life (represented by the pollution) Griffiths meaningfully allows Maggie this moment alone to speak her truth.

The following scene features another juxtaposition of two opposite elements, Pierre and Maggie who are “*try[ing] to make it work*” (25). Pierre cogitates on the public’s

desire to define him and their shifting opinions about their Prime Minister. Rather than engaging, as she does two scenes earlier when they debate about “‘The Just Society’,” Maggie spontaneously exclaims “I just got bored, just this moment” going on to ask “What am I doing with this man? We have nothing to say to each other... All the doors just opened, hundreds of thousands of them. . . . Nothing is certain, anything is possible” (Griffiths and Thompson, “M&P” 22, 25). Diane Bessai considers the incompatibility of the “autocratic philosopher/king and his ‘little jolt of electricity’” becomes obvious (224). Additionally, at the end of the following short scene Maggie sings “Sometimes I feel like a motherless child” three times, while: “*As she sings each line, another child wants to sit on her knee, until finally, all three of her children are balanced with difficulty*” (Griffiths and Thompson, “M&P” 26). Mrs. Trudeau becomes an overwhelmed mother, an expected role as the Prime Minister’s wife, yet just after she recognizes her dissatisfaction with her partner. Maggie in these moments embodies larger struggles of gender essentialism, the macrocosm of women expected to take on what is ultimately too much. In this depiction of the Trudeaus’ marriage these individuals come to embody the classic opposition of passion and reason, the latter representing the relational masculinity of government.

In “Performing Lives” Susan Bennett deftly describes “the very frenetic staging of Maggie and Pierre’s emotional opposition (reason and passion)” (28). A stage direction in “The Fight” establishes “*Behind them hangs an invisible quilt with the phrase ‘Reason over Passion’*” (29). After Maggie destroys this quilt she yells: “After all these years, I

don't even know if you're disturbed or not. I want out. *I want out of Confederation!!* I'm so sick, sick, sick to death of Canada. You know, John A. MacDonald made a railroad and we made a marriage" (30). Griffiths "see[s] the quilt as a somewhat ironic commentary on the Trudeau ideological tag: the very form of the art work, the quilt, makes for an ironic commentary on the rational masculinity of government. Women's contributions are domestic and emotional, a point elaborated by the colours of the quilt and its embellishments (hearts—what Maggie describes as 'butterflies')" (Bennett 27). Furthermore, in this depiction of a "legendary incident in the Trudeau marriage," (Bennett 27) Maggie also declares that "those guys at Confederation, they were drunk. They didn't know what they were doing. John A. put them up to it, and they signed this piece of paper, and we ended up with Canada" (30). Pairing an invisible quilt with the Canadian origin story and the Canadian Pacific Railway with the Trudeaus' marriage, which has fallen into in ruination, questions all of these foundational elements of Canadian history. Somehow, the representatives of Canada at this moment become the very tangible and visible Trudeaus.

Maggie's final scene, "Disco-Election," takes on yet another highly visible moment in the Trudeaus' marriage. "Raunchy rock music heralds the night of the May 1979 election" sets the scene as "MAGGIE appears in full disco regalia and begins to dance through the voices and the election results" (32). The personal becomes overtly political as voices critiquing Maggie's appearance, individual characteristics, and her actions as a mother are interspersed with an announcer reporting the election results.

Each broadcast announces a larger gap between the two parties until “Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and his Liberal Party have been voted out of office” that coincides with Maggie ceasing her dance and beginning a direct address to the audience (33). Where these voices have made her personal characteristics political, she turns this dynamic on its head, accusing, “So...it’s Margaret Trudeau, is it? Well, come on. Everybody’s up there on their little soap boxes. Who’s going to be the first one to stone the whore? . . . Well, come on, I’m the woman that’s offended everybody” (33). The personal moment of the disintegration of their marriage becomes political as it coincides with Trudeau’s loss of the 1979 election.

The depiction of this historical moment in *Maggie & Pierre* does not investigate its effects on the governance of Canada. Instead, Griffiths gives Maggie the space to address the audience, the people of Canada. Expanding her own circumstances to speak to the proverbial everywoman Maggie asks, “Oh, we’re so together, aren’t we, ladies? We’re so on top of it all. We get up in the morning and send the kids off to school, then we get all nice and neat and go off to our really good day job, and we don’t mind that all the bosses are still men, nooo... We’re handling everything well—in control—we have no problems at all—Ssshhh...” (33). Maggie bespeaks the difficult balance women are expected to strike between sexual wife, sacrificial mother, and successful employee. She has become emblematic of the fragmentation of women across Canada and here describes the public’s view of her: “along comes little Maggie Trudeau . . . and she falls apart right in the middle of your television set. She says, ‘I can’t cope...I don’t know if I’m a wife or

a mother, or a career. . . . I can't cope!' . . . And we don't like that, do we, ladies? Nooo. And we don't like that, do we, gentlemen? Nooo. Because if Maggie Trudeau, with all the advantages, falls apart, where does that leave us? In the same boat... Welcome aboard" (33). Linda Griffiths as Maggie on stages across Canada speaks these lines to her audience. They suggest the public are "In the same boat" with "the woman who gave freedom a bad name" (33).

From this moment, Griffiths's focus on feminist issues broadens to consider gender essentialism and how it effects both men and women in a patriarchal society. This expansion develops, once again, from her time researching in Ottawa. In an early interview with Kate Lushington published in *Fireweed* Griffiths candidly speaks about her experience interacting with Pierre: "I had to use all my charm and flirt a lot, just to keep him talking. . . . That research period was the only time in my life when I found being a woman an advantage" (66). Specifically, she admits being able to "get into social functions with journalists because they wanted a woman around" (66). She expounds, "There's nothing wrong with using 'femininity' to your advantage: you know nobody, you have no contacts, you've got to pass through doors all held open by men" (66). Decades later, she recalls this methodology with Andrew Moodie: "I knew that I had an advantage because I was an attractive young woman and I figured that would work for me. It was part of the tools I was playing with" (Griffiths, *On M&P* 2/2). Griffiths learns to play a part in Ottawa, one that gains her access for research purposes.

This lesson also affects how she writes and plays Maggie as well as Pierre. She explains to Lushington, “All those things that I had repressed for feminist reasons, I had to indulge for feminist reasons, to get close to the character of Maggie and to gain power in the male world of journalism and politics” (67). She expands these thoughts in the last section of the interview to more broadly discuss the expectations put on men, “they can’t do anything; they can’t laugh, or cry, not even dance. They have to keep their emotions in a cage” (67). In “Dancing with Trudeau” she explains that during their encounter she realizes her desire to play “this vulnerability” of Pierre’s on stage, but she also knows that in doing so she has to “embody his pain” and recognizes “[i]f he ever saw the play, that’s what he would hate me for the most” (Griffiths, “Dancing” 44).

Pierre’s final moments in *Maggie & Pierre* are spent down on his knees, praying. Henry reacts, “Oh, no. Not religion. Not a guy like you...” Pierre does not recoil, but instead responds vulnerably: “As we were going through all those horrendous fights, my wife was at my feet, and she was crying and screaming and wailing and literally banging her head against the wall, and I stood there, frozen, in the classic pose of man, locked in my own gender” (31-32). The importance of this moment is that “the play was produced in Edmonton during the oil crisis of the 1970s and 1980s [when] this spiritual side became vital. In the scene when the Trudeau character gets down on his knees and prays, I knew that I was holding that whole audience in my fist and keeping them from laughing. And nobody did. Because to laugh at a man praying is evil, even if you’ve decided that he is the Devil incarnate” (Rudakoff 18). Griffiths avoids the easy laughs.

She remains responsible to the character, showing the private pain he experiences due to expectations put upon him because of gender and his political position of power.

Griffiths reveals this vulnerable side of Trudeau and simultaneously expands these characters' experiences to further investigate gender essentialism. Pierre expresses conflicting urges "to go to her and comfort her, or leave because it's too personal to watch, or hit her," not knowing "what do to" (32). Finally, he says: "And my dominant emotion was jealousy...that she could be so free. Perhaps that's the tragedy of the oppressor" (32). Just as Pierre leaves Maggie alone when she cannot maintain her facade, Henry asks, "How do I get out of here?" and "*runs out*" (32). These scenes, with each character's emotional turmoil running parallel to one another, together demonstrate a societal fear of vulnerability and the lack of acceptance for individuals who need to step out of the expectations placed upon them by gender essentialism. Griffiths's experiences in Ottawa combine with this purposeful delving into Maggie and Pierre's private life and intimate feelings to expand these characters into representative figures. In their respective final scenes, both Maggie and Pierre transform into archetypal, mythical examples of men and women across Canada.

The alternative theatre movement set out to tell Canadian stories. In *Maggie & Pierre* Griffiths proves we also have our heroes. Henry's final lines, which harken back to the first scene, conclude the play by solidifying the depiction of these characters as mythological, epic figures. Henry asks in the first scene, "What's the difference between them and anybody else?" (10). He returns to this question in the final moments of the

play, “they can never be two small figures to me, the kind like you hold in the palm of your hand, they’re huge, they’re giant, two Epic Characters, and they carry on a mythological struggle. They’re King Arthur and Guinevere, they’re Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, and they play out our pain way up there” (10). Maggie and Pierre’s story expands beyond the political drama that swept over Canada during Trudeau’s time as Prime Minister. Griffiths transforms them on page and stage into mythological characters who star in epic stories about tragic relationships. Yet, the macrocosm of these grand tales reveals microcosms, just as Griffiths proposes in writing about her dance with Trudeau.

In the final scene, Henry returns to these themes asking, “What can I offer a land suffering from amnesia? Just two small giant figures, the kind like you hold in the palm of your hand” and the play ends as Henry “*holds out his hands as if holding two small figures, then blows on his hand, as if sending them out to the audience*” (34). Henry says in the first scene, “There’s something at the centre of the story, something that echoes through amnesia” (10-11). At the end of the play he diagnoses Canada as “a land suffering from amnesia,” which connects to his earliest quandary (34).

Paired with the emphasis on amnesia, Henry’s action of blowing the figures into the audience suggests that underlying the retelling of this tale exists the purpose of ensuring the story is not forgotten. Bessai points out that “In the first scene, when Henry is deciding to tell that decade-long story ‘one more time’ in order to get it out of his head, he says to the audience: ‘There’s something at the centre of the story, something that

affected everybody deeper than they're willing to admit . . . Certainly something that offended everybody!” (223). The edit made to Henry's opening speech in the iteration of the script featured in *Sheer Nerve* more succinctly connects to the final scene: “There's something at the centre of the story, something that echoes through the amnesia...who's going to do it but me?” (Griffiths and Thompson, “M&P” 11). Griffiths writes *Maggie & Pierre* during a time when Canadian voices are sparsely found on Canadian stages. A central endeavour of this text is therefore the act of creating Canadian mythology to ensure the history of this country is not lost or forgotten.

Griffiths's education and training in collective creation frames and forms a lens for the creation of *Maggie & Pierre* in terms of its focus on these Canadian figures as well as the research and improvisational process. Griffiths simultaneously begins a transition out of creating as a collective part of a group into solo creating and writing. She tells Judith Rudakoff, “And not only did *Maggie and Pierre* turn me into a writer, it turned me into a writer that had notes ahead of time, who researched on my own” (34). Layne Coleman speaks similarly about her success with *Maggie & Pierre*: “You had found what many of us wanted, but because you had achieved your goals early in your life, you were able to become a real writer after that. You drilled down. You focused on the art, on deepening your work” (“Stage Time” 145). This play is Griffiths's first success as a playwright and her first collaboratively written play. It also importantly marks the beginning of her transition between actor and playwright.

1.2 *O.D. on Paradise*: Learning to Write a “Paper Play”

Diane Bessai concludes her introductory chapter in *Playwrights of Collective Creation* by delineating the “two kinds of ‘playwright’” that she features in her study (46). She defines all participants in collective creation as “‘wrights’ in the older sense of the word meaning craftsmen or makers” arguing that their “collaborative creative activity during the rehearsal process” forms the textual product (46). Bessai subsequently identifies Rick Salutin, John Gray, and Linda Griffiths in the second section of her book as “playwrights in the more traditional sense” (46). I contend, in a sense echoing Coleman’s sentiment in the previous section, that Griffiths joins this group of creators who “are creative ‘writers’ of plays that in some manner reflect either the creative process or product of ‘wrighters’” during her creation of *O.D. on Paradise* (46).⁵⁵

Yet, Griffiths as a creator never neatly fits into this either/or consideration, and nor do any of her plays. Griffiths considers *O.D. on Paradise* as a division of “the process of writing from the rehearsal process,” as she expounds in “Process?”: “the writing honed to product and the infectious energy of the rehearsal process spread throughout the theatre to volunteers and audience” (59). Although Griffiths is indeed a playwright, she is unique in her simultaneous identity as actor; throughout her career she

⁵⁵ Referencing Richard Schechner’s essay “The Playwright as Wrighter” in *Public Domain: Essays on the Theatre*, Bessai argues, “The term could apply equally well to Jean-Claude van Itallie, Howard Brenton and Caryl Churchill, to name only a few. That it should also apply in Canada is a point often neglected in the study of contemporary Canadian drama” (46). While a thought-provoking prompt, I will not explore the concept here since my focus rests specifically on Griffiths’s role as a writer outside of collective creation.

discovers how to differently balance these two aspects of her creative identity for each new piece.

In the creative process for *O.D. on Paradise* Griffiths and her collaborator Patrick Brymer decide to write this play together in the more traditional sense of the word. The script begins as seventeen pages that they bring to Clarke Rogers for dramaturgical assistance. Eventually, the play takes on a life of its own within the theatre. Indeed, *O.D. on Paradise* is a strong piece of writing with clear thematic development and nuanced character arcs. However, its importance to the history of Theatre Passe Muraille rests in the Strawberry Tea incident, awards, libel, and the mythological significance the production takes on within the community. *O.D. on Paradise* also holds the place in Griffiths's canon as the play that she creates for the first time as playwright, a writer who clearly demonstrates how her career undergoes a realignment coinciding with Theatre Passe Muraille's shift in leadership and philosophy, solidifying her connection to the theatre as it evolves.

Starting with the sound of "Coming in From the Cold" by Bob Marley, lights up on the set of *O.D. on Paradise* reveal in 1983 what would become Jim Plaxton's Dora Award-winning design of a beach transported onto Theatre Passe Muraille's stage, sand and all. The characters and the audience are "*being bombarded sensually, by the sun, by the extraordinary vibrancy of the colours, smells, and sounds around them. This is Jamaica, but they might as well be on the moon*" (38). A family of four has travelled to the beach for a one-week vacation after patriarch Fred lost his job. He is newly married to

Peggy, described as “born to rule, destined for the bottom” (37). Meanwhile, Fred’s submissive son Vic has also come with his new wife Joan who “just wants a little peace and security” (37). The play is, simply stated, about Canadians vacationing in Jamaica. However, when the family of four meet two younger vacationing couples, Joey and Candy, Karen and Robin, “melting” begins. The narrative that develops on this tropical island touches on subjects such as capitalism, patriarchy, Rastafari beliefs, among others, all intertwined with sexual tension and the heat of the island that is juxtaposed with the looming threat of returning to a cold Canada.

In “Process?” Griffiths expresses her belief that through its process and form *O.D. on Paradise* represents a transition between collective creation and playwrighting that occurs in her career as well as within the evolution of Theatre Passe Muraille. Griffiths writes, “the tone of the theatre, set by [Clarke] Rogers at the time, was special” and she recalls the presence of volunteers who “worked all night to the sound of reggae, making thousands of paper flowers that covered the theatre. It was an atmosphere that pervaded the production: heady and generous” (Griffiths, “Process?” 59). Clarke Rogers takes over as Artistic Director of Theatre Passe Muraille in 1982. Mark Czarnecki publishes “An Illustrious Stage in Transition” in *Maclean’s* in 1983 in which he discloses: “Thompson’s exit last spring ended a prolonged power struggle between himself and Rogers, then his associate director” (Czarnecki 54). Regardless of off-stage drama, this transition of leadership also leads to an evolution of creative emphasis at the theatre. Czarnecki also reports that Rogers takes over with the specific mindset of being “eager to work on

scripted plays” instead of the collective creation method with which Theatre Passe Muraille had created its reputation, arguing this transition is highlighted with Griffiths and Brymer’s piece (54).

Their inspiration for *O.D. on Paradise* stems from a trip they took together before the premiere of *Maggie & Pierre*. When Judith Rudakoff asked Griffiths: “Do you have any other extraordinary memories that did bring something to you, or that showed you something, that brought you to truth?” she immediately recalls: “watching the guy that the character of Vic in *O.D. on Paradise* is based on be carried in from the water, and having him lie there on a bier, with us all eating dinner on the beach around him, and more and more people gradually realizing that he was dead” (31–32). “That’s the sort of moment you recognize,” recalls Griffiths, “[a]nd if you have the inclination at all, those are moments you have to write about” (Rudakoff 32). *O.D. on Paradise* is developed as a written script, there are no improvisational sessions. A plot forms, with Brymer bringing a “sense of structure” to the collaboration that Griffiths feels she could not (Leeper 113). Although this play is inspired by lived experience, unlike collective creation, that nonfictional moment is transformed so entirely into fiction that Griffiths believes “it’s hard to say how much is real” within the final product (Leeper 114).

At the same time, while this play’s process certainly is on paper and the creative methods are not evident in the final product, there are aspects of Brymer’s and Griffiths’s transition between fact and fiction, as well as the form of the piece, that resembles aspects of collective creation. Bessai, for example, considers the “alien situation

prompt[ing] the characters' comic assertion of their native social identities," "the democratic stress on individual characterization," and argues this play follows a "unifying theme in episodic format" rather than a linear plot (226). These elements reflect the influence of collective creation. Furthermore, this play maintains the method of writing through the creator's experiences. However, as Griffiths states in an interview published in 1983: "It's the first [play] that I have actually written on a typewriter where there were pieces of paper before there was life on stage" (Leeper 113).

An early draft reveals the extent of the writing process that went into this script. Of all the traces available the earliest remaining piece is twelve pages, the end of the play. The two scenes are titled "The Last Supper" and "Aftermath" (Griffiths and Brymer, *Last Supper* 40, 48). Without a date or chronological annotation, it remains unknown where exactly in the process this draft falls. It does, however, have different character names that have been scratched out by hand and replaced with the final names of the characters.⁵⁶ Furthermore, there are drastic differences between the content of the script and the version included in *Sheer Nerve*. For example, the final line reads "Deliverance!" rather than the ultimate "Redemption" (Griffiths and Brymer, *Last Supper* 51; Griffiths and Brymer, "O.D." 93). At the same time, it does maintain many of the same themes, such as Karen's soliloquy about leather boots, to which I will return. In all,

⁵⁶ The unspecified draft of this scene titled "The Last Supper Day 6 Later" has the names Brian, Sherry, Betty, Steve, and Ruth typed. They are scratched through and replaced with Joey, Candy, Peggy, Vic, and Joan by hand (Griffiths and Brymer, *Last Supper* 40). Karen, Robin, and Fred are already named so and remain unchanged (Griffiths and Brymer, *Last Supper* 40, 42).

this document is clearly a very early draft of *O.D. on Paradise*. That it remains with Griffiths's papers suggests the ending of the play is emphasized during the process and potentially begins it.⁵⁷ Furthermore, the drastic differences between this draft and the final script demonstrate the extensive work Griffiths and Brymer put into creating this play.

O.D. on Paradise premieres at 25th Street House Theatre on 19 February 1982, in association with Theatre Passe Muraille.⁵⁸ Griffiths plays Joan in this production and Ray Conlogue, noticing her talent, calls her "a charismatic actress, always watchable" ("Too Many Characters Spoil Griffiths' Play" 15).⁵⁹ Dwayne Brenna in *Our Kind of Work* goes into detail about this production, "designer Ramsay King hauled in several hundred pounds of sand to create a Jamaican beach for the production" on the proscenium arch stage at the Saskatoon Theatre Centre (175, 177). Brenna also provides an overview of the play's reception, remarking that most reviews "hinted at, and sometimes named outright, the basic flaw in the script: that it tried to develop all eight characters with equal emphasis" (175). Indeed, Ray Conlogue of the *Globe and Mail* reviews both the 1982 Saskatoon premiere as well as the 1983 Toronto production. Conlogue, in his 1982 piece,

⁵⁷ As discussed in the Introduction, Griffiths did not file her papers chronologically and upon deposition the archivists at the University of Guelph did not organize her papers. Documents pertaining to the writing process for *O.D. on Paradise* are in boxes 51, 53, 56, 67, and 68, with scattered notes also in boxes 2 and 11.

⁵⁸ The cast is comprised of Michael Fahey (Joey), Sharon Stearns (Candy), Nicky Guadagni (Karen), Patrick Brymer (Robin), Linda Griffiths (Joan), Wendell Smith (Vic), Dennis Robinson (Fred), and Diane Douglas (Peggy) (Conlogue, "Too Many Characters Spoil Griffiths' Play" 15).

⁵⁹ Brenna comments: "It was a mark of significance attached to 25th Street Theatre that Ray Conlogue, of the *Globe and Mail*, was flown into Saskatoon to review the opening of *O.D. on Paradise*" (176).

“Too Many Characters Spoil Griffiths’ Play,” complains, “This self-imposed democracy has further frustrating consequence: each character gets about equal time. It’s like glimpsing a range of eight similar-sized mountains in the foggy distance. You’d like to get close enough to explore one or two of them, but no matter how hard you hike they remain just as far away” (15). Griffiths and Brymer purposefully avoid the typical literary structure of certain characters taking the role as protagonists and while others are left with flat supporting roles. A nod to the egalitarian form of collective creations, but also rhetorically demonstrating the play’s anarchist themes, this alternate method of character development seems to miss its mark in the initial production. Conlogue’s descriptions depict the foundational elements of each character, concluding that this first iteration of the script leaves them cooking in a “bouillabaisse” that required further revision (15).

Clarke Rogers directs this original production and subsequently “supervise[s] two rewrites before pronouncing it ready for restaging” (Czarnecki 54). Griffiths describes her work with Rogers and Brymer: “Late at night, sitting at a table with one of those green hanging lights above it, Clarke would smoke, rave and teach us as we listened and argued. ‘What about Peggy, you’ve forgotten her. What happens to Vic after he finds the shells? If you’re going to write a multi character play that gives a nod to the egalitarian structure of collectives, you have to really go somewhere with each character’” (Griffiths, “Process?” 59). It seems that with Rogers’ guidance Griffiths and Brymer find a way to successfully write a play with eight characters, equally developed. The rewritten *O.D. on Paradise* premieres on January 15, 1983 at Theatre Passe Muraille, again directed by

Clarke Rogers, with design and lighting done by Jim Plaxton.⁶⁰ Griffiths steps out of her role as actor to be credited as only playwright for the first time in her career.⁶¹ Conlogue titles his review for this Toronto premiere “Paradise Closer to Perfection” (Conlogue, “Paradise Closer to Perfection” 15). He reiterates that the earlier version “was hard to be encouraging about,” but compliments that the reworked “script has finally settled into place” (15).

Critics of this 1983 production agree that the amended play begins to adjust to the landscape effect of focusing on eight characters equally. In fact, Conlogue writes about the characters in the majority of his article, also praising the performances of the actors and complimenting Rogers on the pacing of the show (“Paradise Closer to Perfection” 15). Similarly, Henry Mietkiewicz of the *Toronto Star* says, “when the characters do click, they can be truly delightful, thanks partly to the energetic pacing of director Clarke Rogers” (E5). He feels, however, that treating characters “with such uniformity . . . makes the flaws of the weaker figures especially blatant” (“Delight” E5). Furthermore, the set receives extended attention in each article, “Everything on the ground floor of Toronto’s Theatre Passe Muraille, from the drifts of sand to the water that laps around the first rows of seats, conspires to create Jamaica” says Conlogue (15). Mietkiewicz agrees:

⁶⁰ The cast’s resemblances to the 25th Street House Theatre production are Nicky Guadagni as Karen, Patrick Brymer as Robin, and Sharon Stearns as Candy. The changes are as follows, Marvin Karon joins as Joey, Nancy Beatty as Joan, Layne Coleman as Vic, John Winston Carroll as Fred, and Sharon Dyer as Peggy.

⁶¹ What is more, *Maggie & Pierre* continues to tour during this time period, but all three roles are played by Patricia Oatman. In fact, the 1981–82 season at 25th Street Theatre begins with Oatman in *Maggie & Pierre* running from February 4–9 (Brenna 174).

“The audience forms four sides of a rectangle, gazing inward at a sandy area. At one end, the beach even slopes to meet the ocean” (E5). This production wins the Dora Mavor Moore award for “outstanding set design for Jim Plaxton’s confection of 22 tons of sand and 47,000 gallons of water” (Conlogue, “Double Dora Winner Brought Back to Life” 21). Actor-director Lee Grant also offers the cast members roles in her latest television film, quoted in a newspaper for saying that this cast demonstrates ““the best ensemble acting [she’s] seen in 10 years”” (“Lee Grant Casts Paradise Actors” 13).⁶² Amongst this praise for the design and acting, Griffiths and Brymer’s script does not receive much attention. That is, until it wins the Dora Award for “outstanding new play of the year, in a stiff field that included plays by Mavis Gallant and George F. Walker” (Conlogue, “Double Dora Winner Brought Back to Life” 21). An excellent combination of acting, design, and writing *O.D. on Paradise* proves a hit and “s[ells] out for eight weeks” (“Process?” 59).⁶³ Theatre Passe Muraille’s 1982–1983 “Yearly Report” states that *O.D. on Paradise* is the most profitable play of the season, although *Alligator Pie* runs for longer (Theatre Passe Muraille, *82-83 Mainstage Yearly Report*).⁶⁴

After its successful 1983 run Theatre Passe Muraille remounts *O.D. on Paradise* in the winter of 1984. Jim Plaxton redesigns his award-winning set, finding room in the

⁶² Nancy Beatty, J. Winston Carroll, Layne Coleman, Nicky Guadagni, and Marvin Karon appear in *The Willmar Eight*, “a television film for NBC, to be filmed in and around Toronto” (“Lee Grant Casts *Paradise* Actors” 13)

⁶³ It ran at an average of 76.45% capacity from 1/15 to 3/6 according to the “Yearly Report.”

⁶⁴ Specifically, “Total Receipts” for the year total \$98, 923.66 with \$34, 457.60 from *Alligator Pie* and \$42, 906.90 from *O.D. on Paradise* (1).

budget for an even more extravagant design, recounting “I returned to the meeting with ten thousand dollars to spend on finishing the renovations and remounting *O.D.*” (162). Despite becoming Theatre Passe Muraille’s runaway hit the previous season, *O.D. on Paradise*’s third iteration does not meet with critical success. Ray Conlogue, upon his attendance of this third iteration of the play, notes that “one of the effects of this pumping-up of production values is to leave the play itself looking a little bare” (Conlogue, “Elaborate Set” 17). Although he speaks glowingly of the realistic set, he spends most of the article musing about the lack of energy and flare to be found in the acting, unlike the previous year’s production. He concludes “Only playing can overcome it, and this cast has a way to go” (Conlogue, “Elaborate Set” 17).⁶⁵ Interestingly, despite the script’s Dora award win it still does not fare well with newspaper critics. However, the most interruptive review of Griffiths’s career was set for publication the next day.

“Paradise lost at Passe Muraille: First-night theatre-goer says things went all to pot” by Sid Adilman ends with a caution: “Theatre-goers, be warned!” and begins with the declaration that “Paradise is hell—at least at Theatre Passe Muraille” (Adilman E1). What Conlogue hints at, “the audience is squinched in wherever seats could be fit,” Adilman says outright, adding that because he could not see or hear the performance “along with a clutch of city arts notables, I walked out at intermission” (Conlogue, “Elaborate Set” 17; Adilman E1). The latter accuses the theatre of poorly organizing the

⁶⁵ Six of the eight cast members remain the same as the 1983 production. The only changes are to Joey and Candy who are now played by Booth Savage and Janet-Laine Green.

seating and the actors of a lack of professionalism as they “seemed to be whispering to each other and not playing to the audience” (Adilman E1). The warmth of the theatre also comes under attack, Adilman accuses the theatre of not fulfilling their promise of air conditioning, “made worse because the actors (all playing tourists) smoked marijuana cigarettes and the pungent odor became trapped in the roof of the set’s cabana tent” (Adilman E1). He concludes by reiterating that the “lack of visibility” and “lack of ventilation” led himself and “**Gina Mallet** (who was seated next to me) and several key arts figures—some of whom administer grants to the theatre” to walk out (Adilman E1). The article is adjusted in later editions of the paper that day, but “the damage had already been done” (Rudakoff 23).

The initial article accuses the actors of committing a crime by smoking marijuana, illegal in Canada at the time, but the cigarettes were later confirmed to contain Strawberry Tea that has the aroma of the illegal substance when ignited. However, the *Globe and Mail* soon reports that on the same day Adilman’s article was published “[a] Metro Toronto Police morality squad sergeant gave Theatre Passe Muraille an official caution” (“Tempest Stirred over Tea Leaves” 3). Three days later, Stephen Godfrey in the *Globe and Mail* reports “Theatre Passe Muraille has served notice of its intention to sue the *Toronto Star* newspaper, entertainment editor Douglas Marshall and entertainment writer Sid Adilman for libel” (E8). This article details that since Adilman’s review “there has been a marked decline in business,” also specifying that when officers attended the theatre they found the actors were not smoking anything illegal on the stage, confirmed

by Police Constable Rick Chase (Godfrey E8). Theatre Passe Muraille does indeed pursue this legal action. Griffiths as writer is not present on the stage smoking the accused props and is therefore not named in the lawsuit. Nonetheless, the consequent events all impact this successful moment in her career and cuts the life of this play short.

To raise funds for the lawsuit, Theatre Passe Muraille holds a Strawberry Tea Benefit that Griffiths speaks about numerous times.⁶⁶ Much later in her career, she revisits the memory with Andrew Moodie, speaking about the wide-reaching implications of this accusation to theatre in Toronto. She says, “we had the Strawberry Tea Benefit because what the other theatres realized was if on no proof the *Star* was going to write . . . if they were going to start doing that, everybody was in trouble” (Griffiths, *On O.D.*). Richard Greenblatt recalls the purpose of the Strawberry Tea Awards: “a fundraiser for a legal defence fund to take Gina Mallet to court when she impugned the theatre by writing in the *Toronto Star* that real weed was used in *O.D. on Paradise*” (211). A brief article in *NOW Magazine*’s 1-7 March 1984 edition describes “a special fund-raising performance on Mar 4 at 8:30 pm,” an effort “to raise money for a defence fund necessitated by some of the media comments on the current production of **O.D. on Paradise**. The fund-raising show will be based on negative—sometimes scathing—notices that Passe Muraille and company members have received over the past 15 years” (“Theatre Passe Muraille Passes Hat” 18).

⁶⁶ Many members of the Theatre Passe Muraille recall this night in oral histories of the theatre and of the scandal surrounding *O.D. on Paradise*, but details about this night in the archives are difficult to find. I discuss scattered traces below.

This event became part of the “battles,” to use Griffiths’s diction, between alternate theatres in Toronto and a certain reviewer who found their work “primitive” (Griffiths, *On O.D.*). Greenblatt, for example, recalls the night: “The fundraiser was everyone reading their worst reviews. I never laughed so hard in my life—and I wasn’t even stoned—as I’d wince in pain and wicked enjoyment at the most cutting ones” (211). Griffiths considers it as “a kind of vetting of the whole business of being chained to these people, the reviewers” (Rudakoff 23). This allegation and its benefit bring the community together as the play continues its run. Judith Rudakoff, for example, reminisces about “seeing the show and watching police watch the show from the lobby/bar area” and recalls “a peculiar tension and a strange sense of outrage and camaraderie suffusing the audience” (23). Even during the lawsuit it is clear in the transcripts that those involved with Theatre Passe Muraille take the opportunity to make underhanded comments about the representatives of the *Toronto Star*. Booth Savage, who plays Joey, testified: “At some point in the scene it [the cigarette containing the substance in question] was passed around . . . my character was a bit reluctant to smoke the joint, by the nature of his character, lawyers being up tight sort of stiff asses, and it was passed over to me” (“B. Savage Examination” 11). The community continues to oppose these established, more conservative professionals that the play critiques, whether it be lawyers, law enforcement, or theatre critics.

Although the Strawberry Tea scandal, in hindsight, brings the community together and provides them the opportunity to air some of their grievances against reviewers, it

also has enduring sinister effects. With the remount of this popular show Theatre Passe Muraille has hopes to reach a new, wider audience. Griffiths tells Rudakoff, “I know *O.D. on Paradise* could have played to general audiences. It was written for that purpose. Maybe it will be produced again. And maybe, someday, someone will publish it” (24). Despite this optimism, she also expresses that although they were eventually successful with the lawsuit, because the targeted new audience “just heard or read the words ‘crime’ or ‘marijuana’ and that was it,” suggesting they become reluctant to attend the show due to these allegations (23). Griffiths also speaks about this years later with Moodie, “no one ever did the play which had proven itself in two productions” (Griffiths, *On O.D.*). Playing to its purpose of attracting a mainstream audience, “the play was a party. It was about people partying in this beautiful atmosphere” (Griffiths, *On O.D.*). Despite the negative reviews that the 25th Street House Theatre’s 1982 production receives, Brenna notes Catherine Lawson is the only critic who “seem[s] to like the production almost without reservation,” quoting her argument that *O.D. on Paradise* is ““the kind of play that can convert a person to theatre-going”” (Brenna 176).⁶⁷ Written to appeal to a broader audience, this play also contains an undercurrent of meaningful, didactic themes.

Specifically, the nod to collective creation connects to underlying anarchist themes as well as the meaningful metaphor about melting. Griffiths accuses “the real

⁶⁷ Brenna cites “Lawson, Catherine. *The StarPhoenix* 20 Feb. 1982: C1” (234n341). Despite my best efforts to find the article online to cite the title, I cannot, and access to any physical material remains unavailable due to the continued shuttering of libraries during the COVID-19 pandemic.

instigator of the libel at the *Star*,” which seems to have remained Mallet in the mythology of Theatre Passe Muraille, of realizing “that the play was actually dangerous and political” (Rudakoff 24). *O.D. on Paradise* “isn’t a benign comedy; it speaks of understanding anarchy and its uses. It demonstrates that anarchy can be dangerous to the people who want to box us up for all our lives” (24). In the second scene, Karen establishes this theme: “There’s an anarchy about the place. It really hits you” (Griffiths and Brymer, “O.D.” 42). The purposefully marked difference between this beach setting and Canada is also developed in this scene, entitled “The Party” (45). Fred comments on other vacationers who are sunbathing nude, “I say, as long as you don’t do it at home, it’s your business” (45). Robin similarly remarks, “It’s amazing what the weather, just the heat, does to you. There’s a real energy here, a sexual energy, you can feel it” (46). Reaching the third scene, the stage directions reveal “*They are starting to be touched by the sun and the sand and the sea. They are starting to crack*” (58). These few examples demonstrate the difference between the setting of the play and its location on a Canadian stage, this juxtaposition of warm and cold becoming an integral part of its didactic themes.

These warmth and thawing motifs play an important role in the underlying political tones of *O.D. on Paradise*. The *Star*’s lawyers often ask the actors about the beginning of “The Party” with the two young couples “*on the porch, passing a spliff of very special stuff*” (41). Indeed, many elements of theatre, including suspension of disbelief, their training, awards, and other work come into question during the

examinations. Tellingly, at the end of his first examination, Clarke Rogers states, “It was a play where the temperature would be equivalent to this room. You would come in in the winter, as you would, dressed as Canadians and you would take off your coat. That was the whole point, you would thaw out a bit” (“C. Rogers Examination” 67).⁶⁸ The concept of thawing or melting relates literally to the movement between a solid and liquid physical state. Yet, the playwrights develop this action to move into a more figurative sense of a person changing, yielding to this process, or being overcome by the alteration of their state of matter.

The character arcs of Vic and Karen exemplify Canadians thawing out in the warm Jamaican climate with the latter most overtly addressing this aspect of the play: “All this pleasure, it’s driving me crazy, I feel like a block of ice trying to melt. And I can’t melt. I’m a failure at melting. Zero out of ten for vacationing” (48-49). Later, Robin calls her an “ice-maiden,” saying “we’ve got to thaw you out” and Karen again expresses “I’m unthaw-able” (51). As the vacation days pass Karen remains unable to enjoy herself as thoroughly as the others. She eventually says, “I woke up this morning and realized that I own a Cuisinart, a dishwasher, two laptops, a fax machine. . . . And I have a respectable job...And I’m making really good money” (63). Vic and Fred interrupt where I have added ellipses, Vic affirming her decisions: “Nothing wrong with that,” he comments on her financial stability (63). Karen disagrees: “There’s everything wrong

⁶⁸ To give context to this statement, Clarke Rogers is answering a question about the charge of “lack of ventilation” and references here Sid Adilman’s accusations of an uncomfortable theatre setting (67).

with it. I don't know if bourgeois is a disease or if you're born with it" (63). Karen consequently develops as a frigid representative of the play's philosophical questioning of capitalism and the potential melting of such an ice block into anarchism.

Unchanged by the thaw-provoking atmosphere, Karen ends the play by "[p]utting on her boots" while contemplating them. "You know, I never have figured out winter boots. If you wear leather, your feet can breathe, but slush gets in and your feet get wet. If you wear rubber, the slush can't get in, but your feet sweat because they can't breathe and they still get wet" (93). The audience hears from Karen a description of a conundrum they likely face often and potentially the current state of their feet. There is a flaw inherent within purchasing commodities and falling into the Cuisinart trap of convenience: these products, this life, this package vacation, will not provide the consumer with perfect results. In fact, the original production offered free admission to any audience member who attended *O.D. on Paradise* in a bathing suit (Griffiths, *On O.D.*). Putting the theatre's financial situation to the side, this production instead encouraged thawing within the audience as well as its characters; a melting away of values derived from the dis-ease of a bourgeois mentality.

While Karen develops these concepts surrounding the theme of melting in the first act, Vic's character arc in the second act demonstrates what happens when a melting Canadian can say "I'm just doing what I want to do" (Griffiths and Brymer, "O.D." 70). To this line, early in the first scene of the second act, Fred replies: "And who told you you could do that?" (70). Vic finally finds the courage to stand up to his father: "You've

got to stay off my back, Dad. You've got to give in once in a while. I was inside a long time, and you still won't let me out. I'm out now, you understand? And nobody's going to tell me different" (73). Importantly, Vic's preoccupations increasingly take him off the stage so he does not take part in the "*big weird bust out*" in "Hedonism," but he returns to support Joan in her melting process (82). When she asks him to be honest he tells her "I can't go back to the way I was before . . . I can hardly remember what it's like back there, streetcars, horns blowing, alarm clocks, grey sky...in my sleep now, I don't even dream, I just hear waves" (83). He has found freedom outside, in the warmth of Jamaica. His body has found its new home in this place that "can heal anything," but he continues to be drawn back to Joan (85).

The play begins its denouement when Fred demandingly declares his "family should do something together for once and that means everybody" (85). Vic requests to join later but is met with the reply "Get a move on" (86). Obeying, the entire family exits the stage and the audience continues to hear Fred yelling "Get a move on, Vic. I'm not spending forty dollars American for nothing" (86). Significantly, when Joan asks Vic earlier what she could do differently he says "Nothing" (84). A nuanced juxtaposition develops between Vic's newfound contented state existing freely in Jamaica and Fred's controlled state of existence. Forced to follow his "own kind" Vic finds himself cliff-diving with his family (86). While they cheer him on, Vic "*stands at the edge of a forty-foot cliff, about to dive again*" and calls to Joan: "This one's for you. I love you! *He*

dives. Everyone cheers. Blackout” (88). Each character has her or his own path to travel in the play, but their disparate journeys are brought together at this moment.

When the lights come back up Vic is laying on the sand. While the other characters speak around him, Vic “*as if in his last dream*” has three telling pieces of text which repeat “It’s been a long time coming” (88-89). The audience learns Vic lost consciousness and passed away while returning home on the boat, yet it is later disclosed that an autopsy could not reveal his cause of death. The title, *O.D. on Paradise*, references Vic’s eccentric death. It seems to caution that both the warm and cold way of life may be hazardous, especially if in conflict. However, this moment causes each character to undergo “*a subtle but complete transformation,*” especially Joan who “seems a new creature, shocked to the core yet rising” (92). She uncharacteristically dictates that Fred is not to bring Vic’s body back to Canada, also telling him “I’m coming back [to Jamaica] with the kids next year, for two weeks” (93). Her final line: “You don’t have to be a Rasta to know Vic’s not dead” establishes that having witnessed Vic’s transformation has imprinted each travel companion with a different sense about death, and life (93).

In *O.D. on Paradise* Griffiths and Brymer powerfully and meaningfully weave together the story of eight Canadians vacationing in Jamaica, doing so in this party of a comedy. After the pot accusation and the announcement of the potential libel, the *Toronto Star* sends Henry Mietkiewicz to write an unbiased review. He tellingly touches, once again, on the structure of the text, writing that it “has no actual central figure and

does not begin tying together its thematic strands until the last two or three scenes. The lack of focus is as acute in the current production as it was in the original” (Mietkiewicz, “Repaired” H2). However, an analysis of the script reveals that the resistance of focusing on a character or two purposefully questions the accepted conventions set for the creators of plays. In fact, *O.D. on Paradise* speaks on multiple levels of the benefits of a more equal existence. Perhaps this existence can be found in the warmth of another country and can be taken back out into the cold of Canada by those who have witnessed the “*subtle but complete transformation*” of these characters (Griffiths and Brymer, “O.D.” 92). The final scene plays to the tune of “*Bob Marley’s ‘Redemption Song’*” and the audience is left with Robin’s parting utterance: “Redemption” (93).

Although the script of *O.D. on Paradise* is incredibly well written, its significance in the history of Theatre Passe Muraille and Griffiths’s canon rests in the almost mythical aura the production has taken on within the theatre community. In the recently published *Theatre Passe Muraille: A Collective History* (2019) many of the contributors fondly remember the history of the theatre through recollections of *O.D. on Paradise*. Severn Thompson, Paul Thompson’s daughter, recalls: “All around the theatre I watched artists, technicians, and administrators work to accomplish what must have seemed impossible at times—successful new Canadian plays. These people were and are still my heroes, endlessly fascinating on and off stage. . . . On stage there were so many brilliant productions and vivid memories for me, such as the incredible transformation of the theatre into a tropical beach for *O.D. on Paradise*” (122). Clarke Rogers’s wife also

remembers his part in the Strawberry Tea incident: “When Linda Griffiths and Patrick Brymer’s 1983 play *O.D. on Paradise*, about Canadian tourists in Jamaica, was accused of having the actors smoking pot on stage, he took the *Toronto Star* to court. Although the accusations in the review by Gina Mallet had killed the box office, he and lawyer Charles Campbell won a settlement that helped pay for renovations to the building, and set the theatre on solid financial footing” (Johnson 27). What Johnson here discusses is renovations to Theatre Passe Muraille done between the two productions of *O.D. on Paradise*. The floor connecting two smaller spaces is removed to make one large room with two levels of audience seating. Not all spectators feel this initial change is successful in creating a pleasant atmosphere, but with the financial resources gained from the lawsuit, the theatre was able to make further changes.

While traces of the Strawberry Tea incident and Benefit remain in interviews and writings by community members of Toronto theatre during the 1980s, *O.D. on Paradise* also remains as an award winning, box office success, and a fine script that has only been published in the (now out of print) collection of Griffiths’s work, *Sheer Nerve* (1999). It has yet to be remounted again, a common fate in Canadian theatre, although this play managed to defy that outcome immediately. Rogers mentions the success of Griffiths’s first play, *Maggie & Pierre*, when questioned during his second examination with *Toronto Star* lawyers about attempting to reach “a broader audience” (“C. Rogers Continued Examination” 85). It seems that Griffiths is on the trajectory of hitting two home runs in the first stage of her career with this “very middle of the road, family

entertainment play,” as Rogers describes it, and poignantly adds, “or it was before you boys got a hold of it” (“C. Rogers Continued Examination” 86). What the life of this play could have been can never be known, but Griffiths suspects that “in many ways it stuck . . . the stigma stuck” because this scandal came “just at a time when things were starting to get normal. It was at a time when this whole idea of the theatres being alternate to the mainstream culture was changing. The mainstream culture was becoming more conservative and so the theatres had to be more conservative” (Griffiths, *On O.D.*). *O.D. on Paradise* comes into being during a transitional period for theatre in Toronto, and the implications of its three productions were widespread.

In fact, the artistic members of this production also transform into “Epic Characters” who “carry on a mythological struggle,” to return to the sentiments of *Maggie & Pierre* and the ideology of the alternative theatre movement (11). In “Passe Muraille Saved My Life,” Andrew Moodie reminisces about asking Layne Coleman and John Allen to tell tales of “‘The Old Days.’ The early days of Passe Muraille” (192). Moodie calls their stories “something like Camelot,” that in his imagination “Paul Thompson was the bearded wizard Merlin. Clarke Rogers was King Arthur. Linda Griffiths was Lady Guinevere” and Layne Coleman, “sitting behind a table, dolling out pithy words of wisdom, was Lancelot” (192). He specifies “*O.D. on Paradise* was a seminal moment in their lives, a truly bacchanalian production on and off the stage” (192). Just so, Griffiths ends her discussion with Moodie about *O.D. on Paradise*, years before *Theatre Passe Muraille: A Collective History* is published, by calling this time

“real war. It was real war” (Griffiths, *On O.D.*). Just as *Maggie & Pierre* tells the story of Canadian heroes, the history of *O.D. on Paradise* identifies the stars and the warriors of Canadian theatre. Griffiths and those around her championed new plays as well as new talent on stage and off.

In all, this play holds a curious, somewhat untraceable role in the evolution of Theatre Passe Muraille and remains an important moment in Griffiths’s career. She continues to move fluidly between the two identities of actor and playwright. The production of *O.D. on Paradise* sees her play with the idea of acting in her own work again, but she ultimately decides to step away and participate only as playwright. While considering the next phase of her career, she expresses, “I want to try and start to weave acting and writing back together and see where that leads me” (Rudakoff 36). Griffiths continues to discover that Canadian theatre has space for playwrights with an actor’s side or sensibility to them. “I really do like doing writer readings. At first I thought that you shouldn’t *do* anything, that I had to pretend, as the playwright, that I wasn’t acting: I came prepared to act very dry. . . . But then I see John Gray get up, and he’s got *music* with his piece! And Judith Thompson’s up there, and she’s acting away,” she tells Judith Rudakoff (25). Griffiths begins to experiment within this space of artistic freedom to be herself with *The Darling Family* (1991). And she begins to work with new collaborators and methods in the next phase of her career. However, before transitioning as an actor-playwright into the 1990s she completes another collaborative project, which has been a work-in-progress for years, this one with Maria Campbell.

1.3 Jessica: Problematic Collaboration and Women in Canadian Theatre

Maria Campbell draws inspiration from her experience of *Almighty Voice*, directed by Clarke Rogers, which she attends as an audience member in 1974. In *The Book of Jessica* she explains she goes to this production because “the Native community was in an uproar. It was a play about Native people done by whites” (Griffiths and Campbell, *Book of Jessica* 16). She also explains that despite this production’s portrayal of “a spiritual world that we felt should be interpreted by Natives themselves,” she sees potential in it as “something that educated, that healed, that empowered people; it was fun and it was magical” (16). What intrigues her, specifically, is the power of theatre. Campbell seeks the “skills and tools to help make change” by researching theatrical creative methods and attempting to write a play using books she had found at libraries as a guideline (16). She recounts in *The Book of Jessica* that this first attempt, which was in collaboration with “other women . . . didn’t work” (16). Eventually, Campbell reaches out to Paul Thompson, who had travelled to Saskatchewan to work on *The West Show* (16). The two work together for years trying to develop Campbell’s vision of a play “about a woman struggling with two cultures, and how she got them balanced; because when she leaned into one, a part of her got lost, so she had to lean in to the other one and try to understand and find a balance” (17).

Linda Griffiths joins the project as an actor-improvisor-playwright with extensive experience in Thompson's collective creation method. Together with Campbell, she creates a play entitled *Jessica: A Theatrical Transformation* which premieres in 1982 and again, after extensive rewrites by Griffiths, in 1986. The exact timeline remain unrecorded, but *The Book of Jessica* points to July 1982 as the time when the "[f]irst full-scale improvisational jam session" occurs in Edmonton with Campbell, Griffiths, and Thompson working alongside actors Tantoo Cardinal, Graham Greene, and Bob Bainborough (9).⁶⁹ Griffiths recounts in *The Book of Jessica*, "[f]inally, I was part of the idea, about to work with Paul Thompson, director of the maverick Theatre Passe Muraille, and Maria Campbell, Métis writer, activist, teacher, catalyst" (17). Maria's voice interjects: "What a bunch of garbage. I'm a community worker. A mom. 'Metis writer'? — I should have a giant typewriter? 'Activist'? — I should be throwing Molotov cocktails? It just sounds so...so much like a white professor introducing me at a convention of anthropologists" (18). This excerpt comes from *The Book of Jessica*, first published in 1989, which contains the 1986 play script as well as two preceding sections comprised of material from recorded conversations between Campbell and Griffiths, "Spiritual Things" (11-64) and "The Red Cloth" (65-112) as well as a chronology of the project (9–10). The miscommunications, disagreements, and cultural differences that

⁶⁹ *The Book of Jessica* also states that in the winter of 1980, while on tour with *Maggie & Pierre*, Griffiths met with Campbell, on Paul's suggestion: "They decide that Linda will improvise and perform the central character in a story as yet unformed" (Griffiths and Campbell, *Book of Jessica* 9).

encircle the process of *Jessica*, such as this relatively facile example, are laid bare in this book.

After the initial 1982 jam session the three original collaborators meet in Toronto at Theatre Passe Muraille to continue developing the play. Subsequently, the work from these sessions is pieced “into a script” for a full production in September of that year in Saskatoon at 25th Street House Theatre (9). These two theatres co-produce the premiere of *Jessica* which runs from 4-20 November in 25th Street House Theatre’s 1982-1983 season (Makahonuk 7). *The Book of Jessica* weightily describes the run as “successful . . . but it ends in disagreement” which is followed by the next two notes, “There is no contact between Maria and Paul or Linda. Silence on the project . . . Linda rewrites and restructures *Jessica*” (9). These few lines cover the period from 1982 to after the first premiere to March 1985, after which Theatre Passe Muraille premieres the revised script in 1986. The reader is told this production “is well received” (10). Indeed, *Jessica* wins the Dora Mavor Moore Award for Outstanding New Play, receives a nomination for a Chalmers Award, and wins Best Canadian Production at the Quinzanne International Festival in Québec City (10).

Finally, Campbell suggests to Griffiths that they converse about the process of *Jessica*, the conversations to be recorded and the product to be published as an accompaniment to the play. These conversations comprise the majority of *The Book of Jessica: A Theatrical Transformation*, initially published by Coach House Press in 1989 and still available through Playwrights Canada Press. This book contains the 1986 play

script as well as a short section summarizing the history of the play's process. Most of the book, however, is comprised of "Spiritual Things" and "The Red Cloth," both edited by Griffiths, which focus on the conversations between Campbell and Griffiths taped in 1988. "Spiritual Things" contains an interplay between Griffiths's musings on the process and portions of her conversation with Maria, while "The Red Cloth" consists of discussion with only editorial interruption of subheadings.

All these aspects of *The Book of Jessica* serve to drastically impact how the script, located at the end of this book, makes meaning and has been received. For example, the first section, entitled "History," recounts in two pages the incredibly laborious process leading to *Jessica* and *The Book of Jessica*. The reader learns that in "Winter 1974, Edmonton . . . Maria Campbell sees Clarke Rogers's production of *Almighty Voice*, and decides she wants to do theatre" (9). Next on the list is "Fall 1976, Saskatoon. Paul Thompson, artistic director of Theatre Passe Muraille, tours with *The West Show*. Maria and Paul connect and discuss doing a project together" (9). These simplified moments are but two of twenty-five listed. I use these two examples to demonstrate how the text represents the process as well as the historically loaded moment and the movement into which this project entered.

The Book of Jessica, since its publication, has been examined and reviewed by scholars through many different theoretical lenses. Early on, Helen Hoy's "'When You Admit You're a Thief, Then You Can Be Honourable': Native/Non-Native Collaboration in *The Book of Jessica*" (1993) considers in three parts this incredibly complex text. She

looks at *The Book of Jessica* “as textual appropriation,” “as postcolonial deposition,” and finally “as textual resistance” (26, 29, 34). While the first section vehemently critiques Griffiths, by the third section Hoy considers how Campbell “shifts the focus, for the white writer, from a project of moral self-purification—demonstrating cultural sensitivity or entitlement—to one of political effectiveness. A presumed position of transgression, as a given, becomes, not grounds for profitless apology, but a responsibility incurred, the springboard for socially accountable art—or scholarship” (36). Yvette Nolan’s *Medicine Shows: Indigenous Performance Culture* provides a very different perspective on *Jessica* and the continuing relationship between Campbell and Griffiths beyond this 1989 text. By bringing voices from Indigenous theatre in Canada into a conversation with academic analyses of *The Book of Jessica*, as well as archival material on the project, it becomes clear the entire process of *Jessica* is Campbell’s gift, of which only a fragment appears in the published text. Having established the need to look outside of *The Book of Jessica*, I reflect on Griffiths’s call to consider how her work with Campbell influences her future artistic endeavours. Overall, an exploration of the entire conversation between Campbell and Griffiths about the creation of *Jessica* along with Yvette Nolan’s discussion of this play and the relationship between these women demonstrates the necessity of considering this collaborative project as an ever-rippling process rather than as a definitive (textual) product.

A central component of the critical conversation surrounding *The Book of Jessica* focuses on the relationship between Campbell and Griffiths. However, as David Jefferess

observes, “*The Book of Jessica* is rarely read as a collaboration or, if it is, as a ‘collaborative process which breaks down, or nearly does’” (221). Citing Boardman, Jefferess goes on to consider Perreault and Bessai, who each “attribute[] the authorship of the play to Linda alone,” and Venema, Egan, and Hoy as “read[ing] Maria Campbell’s role in *The Book of Jessica* as that of resister to Griffiths’s story” (221).⁷⁰ Lorraine York similarly points to the frequently asserted argument “that out of the collaborative venture a single author emerges to exert control: Linda Griffiths” (171). Meanwhile, D. A. Hadfield points to “Hoy’s much-cited article [which] mounts a tough attack against Griffiths and her appropriative (mis)use of white privilege” (205). She importantly argues: “I think this view greatly underestimates or unfairly dismisses the self-consciousness with which *The Book* undermines any sense of authoritative voicing, including Griffiths’s own” and continues in a footnote, “In subsequent sections of the paper, Hoy does concede a more dialogic instability in the text, but the first section of her article, where she is most openly critical of Griffiths, makes the argument for which she is most commonly read and cited” (Hadfield 205–06, 238n8). Indeed, as Jacqueline Petropoulos concludes in the most recent publication (2018) on *The Book of Jessica*,

⁷⁰ The most cited scholarship written on *The Book of Jessica* includes Kathleen A. Boardman’s “Autobiography as Collaboration: *The Book of Jessica*” (1994), Jeanne Perreault’s “Writing Whiteness: Linda Griffiths’s Raced Subjectivity in *The Book of Jessica*” (1996), Bessai’s discussion in her chapter on Linda Griffiths in *Playwrights of Collective Creation*, Kathleen Venema’s “‘Who Reads Plays Anyways?: The Theory of Drama and the Practice of Rupture in *The Book of Jessica*” (1995), Susanna Egan’s “*The Book of Jessica*: The Healing Circle of a Woman’s Autobiography” (1995), and Helen Hoy’s “‘When You Admit You’re a Thief, Then You Can Be Honourable’: Native/Non-Native Collaboration in *The Book of Jessica*” (1993) (Boardman; Perreault; Bessai; Venema; Egan; Hoy).

“This critical balancing act continuously repeats and rehearses the problem of appropriation, refusing to view the text as a shared, albeit conflicted, site of cross-cultural appropriation” (“Re-Viewing Jessica and The Book of Jessica: Critical and Cultural Transformations” 113). What becomes clear from these overviews of scholarship is the duality of their argument, but also the tendency of these scholars to focus on *The Book of Jessica* as text. More recently, scholars such as Hadfield and Petropoulos have begun to reconsider these searches for an *authoritative* voice.

As York asks: “Why is it that the criticism of *The Book of Jessica* seems to replicate the property dispute that lies at the heart of that text: the theft of stories by white artists?” (174). A potential answer lies within the emphasis upon the authority of the text. However, she also points out that critics “[f]or the most part . . . wish to balance their critique of Griffiths’s appropriation with a postcolonial argument that Campbell fights back, resists and reasserts her control over the text and the collaboration” (172).⁷¹ York astutely considers the “use of the statement-response” in *The Book of Jessica* as “[t]his format readily suggests the critical arguments about Campbell resisting or taking back the text, since Campbell frequently figures as the respondent” (177). While accusations of appropriation dominate the discourse surrounding this text, some recuperative work has also been done, even within the articles that most vehemently critique Griffiths. However, as Petropoulos tells us, these recuperative studies “caution against a utopian

⁷¹ Lorraine York’s article, in fact, contains a very thorough overview of existing scholarship on *The Book of Jessica*.

reading, since the relations of power and inequality explored in the text are never resolved” (115). Yes, within “the text” they have never been resolved.

Reconsidering *Jessica*’s “History” without giving the written text final authority over the project helps to make sense of the disparate critical analyses of this section. On one hand, Hoy describes it as written in a “deceptively objective third-person” style that she takes to be another piece of “disturbing evidence of appropriation [which] wrinkles the text of *The Book of Jessica*” (27). On the other, Hadfield considers this small piece of the text to be undermining itself “by implicating the unspeakable effects that the factual events set in motion” (204). The distinct difference between the word choice used to describe the object of analysis reveals the foundation of these two opposing viewpoints. Hoy’s “the text” and Hadfield’s juxtaposition of “unspeakable effect” and “factual events” analyze different pieces of art. “Every time *Jessica* appears as a completed artifact in this chronology, it is haunted by the weight of the unspoken: ‘There is no contact between Maria and Paul or Linda. Silence on the project . . . Linda sends Maria the new script. Maria is angry’” (Hadfield 204). Therefore, condensing each moment of the process into one to four lines of text, or the final five-line point, does not and cannot describe them in their totality.

The creation of *Jessica* and *The Book of Jessica* spans almost the entirety of the 1980s across Canada and contains within it “[s]o many ties, threads, connections, personalities and history . . . that no one knew where it had started” (16). Demonstrating exactly this point, even *The Book of Jessica* proves unable to definitively finalize the

chronology as it provides contradicting dates for the opening of the first production of *Jessica*. “History” lists the rehearsal and performance of this play as October and November of 1982 in Saskatoon at 25th Street House Theatre (9). Contradictorily, the “Notes” section which introduces the script at the end of the book states “*Jessica* was first co-produced . . . in October 1981” (115). Interestingly, *Sheer Nerve* also lists October 1981 while the archival finding aid to the 25th Street Theatre Collection lists a November 4, 1982, and makes no mention of the project in 1981 (Griffiths, “Jessica” 96; Makahonuk 11). Other scholars have noticed the error or pointed to this chronology’s omission of other productions of the play which occurred during the period covered in “History” (Petropoulos 105n1, Hadfield 207).⁷² I argue that these discrepancies demonstrate that although writing a summary of this play’s process is possible, paired with Griffiths’s statement that “no one knew where it had started,” they point to the inability of this text to contain the true extent of the project (Griffiths and Campbell, *Book of Jessica* 16). Indigenous theatre practitioner Yvette Nolan similarly defines this collaboration as “a years-long exploration of [Griffiths and Campbell] trying to understand each other, of trying to tell a story that they both knew was important, and of telling it in the form that they both believed in: theatre” (*Medicine Shows: Indigenous Performance Culture* 129). These women come together with a belief in theatre and with

⁷² Jacqueline Petropoulos points to this discrepancy in a footnote but does not consider how it impacts the text (105n1).

the hope of creating something healing and connecting, not with a final text in mind, but with a focus on the long-term importance and impact of their work together.

In her study for the Canada Council for the Arts, “The Developmental Support to Aboriginal Theatre Organizations” (2005), Métis theatre practitioner, screenwriter, filmmaker, Maria Clements identifies *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* (1967) by George Ryga as “the first theatre production to expose the possibility of an Aboriginal voice in the Canadian landscape” (9). She displaces this appropriative play with Tomson Highway’s *The Rez Sisters* (1986), which is produced by Native Earth Performing Arts in Toronto, as the moment “Aboriginal theatre professionals believe . . . Aboriginal theatre truly came alive” (10). Clements moves away from work that has been “produced on many of the mainstream stages of Canada” to consider the occurrences of “Aboriginal training initiatives [that] hit the back roads and inner cities of Canada deepening the expression of the Aboriginal experiences, both rural and urban” (11). “Maria Campbell—*Jessica*” appears on Clements’s list of self-taught and self-reliant Indigenous artists whose unprecedented voice and vision in Canadian theatre continues to impact Indigenous artists today (11). Similarly, Nolan does not exonerate Griffiths and brings *Jessica* into her chronology of Indigenous theatre, stating that this play “is in many ways the beginning of an Indigenous theatre in this country, even though it was created by two non-Native artists and produced by non-Native theatres in Saskatoon and Toronto” (*Medicine Shows: Indigenous Performance Culture* 21). She defines this play as an “‘eighth fire production’—one created by a group of Indigenous and settler artists in an

attempt to create understandings of and forge a new and healthy way forward together” (21). Rather than focusing on accusations of appropriative authorship, this understanding of *Jessica* enables an acknowledgement of the shortcomings of the collaboration while also considering this troubled project’s impact on Indigenous theatre.⁷³ Clements and Nolan both demonstrate how Indigenous theatre practitioners and writers consider *Jessica* as holding a troubled yet important role in the development of Indigenous theatre.

Specifically, Nolan discusses this work in a chapter titled “Survivance” (*Medicine Shows: Indigenous Performance Culture* 21). She calls *Jessica* “the first,” placing this play in the lineage of the “many Indigenous artists [who] would tell their own survivor’s narrative over the next thirty years” (23). During the ceremony Vitaline performs in the beginning of the play, she uses *Jessica*’s modern bundle, her suitcase, and tells her “The spirits are giving you a great gift. They’re going to take you back” (Griffiths and Campbell 121, 125). The following sections draw on Maria Campbell’s life from the death of her mother, to being raped by an RCMP officer at the age of twelve, her time as a sex worker, subsequent drug abuse, as well as other difficult and traumatic moments of

⁷³ On the subject of the unspoken, Clements’s choice to omit Griffiths’s name aligns with Nolan writing Campbell’s name before Griffiths’s when including *Jessica* on a list remembering “the last thirty years of Indigenous performance in this country” (Nolan, *Medicine Shows: Indigenous Performance Culture* 144). Each decision establishes that Campbell and Griffiths discuss a flawed process, as Griffiths notes with Jacklin: “Whether the project should exist at all is another question” (Jacklin 130). Griffiths shares this same thought in *The Book of Jessica*: “I had no idea of the real powder keg that I was walking into. . . . I knew somehow I was putting out a kind of racism, but I didn’t know what it was. Maybe my racism was in not accepting that there would be racism” (Griffiths and Campbell, *Book of Jessica* 34). Indeed, Nolan says *Jessica* is “a manifestation of the heartbreak of Native theatre in this country” (*Medicine Shows: Indigenous Performance Culture* 22).

her life. For example, as Jessica is healing after being in “*The Looney Bin*” she meets Sam who importantly denies how she has explained her hospitalization: “Because I’m crazy. . . .” (142, 144). He declares: “No, because you’re oppressed. . . . It’s true. The crazy houses and penitentiaries are full of our people. . . . Look at it this way. We’ve been murdered, starved, raped and pillaged. When that didn’t work they infected us with diseases, fed us booze and made us dependent on handouts. They stole our land, broke up our families, outlawed our language and religion, and worst of all, they spent a lot of money making terrible movies about us. We’re outlaws, and if we can admit that, we can fight back” (144). Jessica replies “All you can do is try to survive . . .” but Sam counters, “You don’t just have to survive, you can stand up” (144-45). This play outcries the atrocities that Indigenous people have faced and continue to face in Canada by telling Jessica’s story and how she survives.

With regards to an appropriation of Indigenous trauma, it is important to acknowledge that Griffiths does not “describe” Campbell’s life in the play, nor does she “turn it into journalism” (27). In this section of their conversation in *The Book of Jessica* Campbell insists upon these elements of the play’s story. Griffiths offers, “Alright, I’ll cut it all out,” but Campbell refuses her resignation: “No, not your experience. You’re an artist, find a way to do it (28). Campbell here challenges Griffiths to explore how to responsibly create art. While working together and during their recorded conversations Maria Campbell repeatedly demonstrates an unwillingness to discontinue the project, remaining focused on her responsibility to her community. For example, she considers

her Métis culture, “We don’t own anything . . . that’s the big lesson for me. The giving away of gifts to people” (Campbell and Griffiths, *Tape 5*). She describes her work as “sharing, giving things to people. People giving me things, because that’s what community work is. It’s an exchange of power so that people get strong. That’s what I believe in. That’s what I’ve worked toward when I’m working” (Campbell and Griffiths, *Tape 5*).⁷⁴ Indeed, Sam utters poignant lines that touch on the history of Canada before he also asserts the need for equality and justice: “Everybody has the right to food, shelter, clothing, and when the work is done, to something beautiful” (145). Here, the content of this script demonstrates Griffiths’s attempts in her rewriting of *Jessica* to follow Campbell’s teachings about how to create responsible art.

Furthermore, during their conversation about stealing, when Griffiths admits “I’m a thief . . . I have always been a thief,” (Griffiths and Campbell, *Book of Jessica* 82). a small exchange occurs that did not make its way into *The Book of Jessica*. The text cites

⁷⁴ Campbell also struggles with feelings of ownership, an aspect of their conversations that Griffiths did not include in *The Book of Jessica*. Nearing the end of “The Red Cloth,” a portion of the conversation has been titled “Owning” (90). One of the many moments that the co-creators circle this concept of owning, or ownership, this section begins with Maria speaking more broadly about her context, the position from which she views this project, “In community work there’s an exchange of power, a sharing, and as a result we all get strong” (90). Touching on many issues central to *The Book of Jessica*, this statement leads to Maria questioning herself “what I’ve learned from *Jessica* in the last little while . . . why do I hurt when we talk about these things?” and concluding, “It’s because I can never own it either, and everything else in my life I’ve always owned” (90). In their taped conversation, this portion comes before what Griffiths titles “The Brick” and ends with Linda admitting that the fact she “can never own it” is what still “hurts” (90). A damning moment, but looking at its entirety, Griffiths edits out Maria’s reply: “Neither can I . . .” (Campbell and Griffiths, *Tape 5*). What followed was also Maria’s consideration of her Métis culture, “We don’t own anything. . . . And that’s maybe what one of the lessons that are in there, certainly for you and me” (Campbell and Griffiths, *Tape 5*).

Campbell's reply, "But there is nothing wrong in that, as long as you know and accept" (83). However, their conversation originally flowed differently,

MARIA. But there is nothing wrong in that.

LINDA. For white culture, there certainly is.

MARIA. I mean if you are walking around being a different kind of thief, maybe, because I do have my things about what you say . . . what I'm saying is that that's the revelation you had today. That's what you have discovered. (Campbell and Griffiths, *Tape 2*)

Their discussion surrounding notions of stealing, thievery, and owning is much more complex than *The Book of Jessica* conveys. In fact, Campbell implicates white culture in its obsession with ownership and thievery and insists upon progressing past these sentiments to find healing.

Ultimately, Maria's words are what the reader is left with at the end of "The Red Cloth." She tells Griffiths, "I don't know if I'll ever stop being angry with you, but I want to adopt you [*laughing*], so I can get after you the same way I get after my own daughters. . . . What am I saying? I must be out of my mind" (Griffiths and Campbell 112). In 2002, during an interview with Michael Jacklin, Griffiths considers her parting with Campbell. She acknowledges that "the aftertaste for her [Campbell] hasn't been good" but contemplates the possibility of visiting her. Griffiths imagines: "she would let me in. . . . We'd argue, eventually one of us would laugh, and the talking would get easier. We wouldn't be friends in the usual sense, we would simply be two women who

had been through hell together. Maybe that's pure fantasy. We did the impossible, and that's never pretty" (Griffiths in Jacklin 138). Griffiths was not wrong. In *Medicine Shows* Yvette Nolan returns to the relationship between these two women by looking beyond *The Book of Jessica*:

In 2014, Linda Griffiths passed away. As she was dying, she asked through intermediaries for Maria to sing the Grandmother Song. Maria called and sang to Linda's voicemail, and in the final few weeks of Linda's time on this earth, her caregivers played the recording again and again. At Linda's memorial at Theatre Passe Muraille on September 29, 2014, people spoke about Linda's brilliance, her talent, and her passion for the work and the life. And at the end of the evening, the last few minutes were projections of tree branches against a sky, and the sound of Maria Campbell, singing in Cree to Linda Griffiths.

This is how we go forward. (Nolan 130)

This image is not a tourist collecting souvenirs (Hoy 27). As Nolan states, and rhetorically demonstrates by naming her final chapter, "This is how we go forward," Campbell and Griffiths's collaboration is troubled and remains troubling, and yet they were connecting two cultures in a new way, trying to find this "healthy way forward together" (21; 131). Overall, the collaboration between these two women becomes more poignant and nuanced not when considered through *The Book of Jessica*, but as an

aggregate of many parts and far-reaching consequences and possibilities which are lost if defined by one word or the published text.

Campbell also tells Griffiths, “I made the promise to those same grandmothers before you did. . . . I didn’t know what was going to happen, but I knew it was going to be pretty awful” (Campbell and Griffiths, *Tape 7*). She continues, “I told you before, I was told if you believe that’s what you have to do then that’s what you have to do . . . you’ve got to be responsible and you’ve got to stay with it. . . . And no matter how many times I want to cut it off I can’t for that reason. You think I haven’t let it go because of you? Forget it, I’d have dropped you a long time ago” (Campbell and Griffiths, *Tape 7*). Campbell knew this project was going to be uncomfortable, but she felt compelled to see it through. This dedication, what she gave to the process, cannot be passed over because of Griffiths’s involvement. Nolan points out, “Maria Campbell survived to write *Half-Breed*, which begat *Jessica*, and then survived the making of both the play and the chronicle of the making. She went on to make other theatre, writing plays, serving as the writer-in-residence . . . working with Indigenous students . . . to create their own plays about their lives” (Nolan 22-23). As she taught Griffiths, Campbell persevered and ensured her art was responsible to those it stole from. She insisted upon the creation of this new community with their theatrical work, for the purpose of healing and finding a “healthy way forward together” (21).

In another section of their conversation, Campbell asserts her belief that “[t]he reader also needs to hear [Griffiths’s] side of the story” and proposes: “so maybe what we

have to do is we have to pretend that Jessica's sitting over there, and I'm telling here, and you're telling there" (Campbell and Griffiths, *Tape 1*). Campbell at this moment also discusses Griffiths's choice to work on *Jessica* edits alone: "I'm over here saying, 'But you went ahead and did it and showed it to me after the fact.' This is how you came to me. What did you expect me to do? You knew that I wasn't going to cut it off. If you were feeling that kind of energy pulled toward that, then you knew that my commitment wasn't finished either. You have to allow me to say those things, like I have to allow you to say those things" (Campbell and Griffiths, *Tape 1*). Despite their mutual "resistance to working together" that Campbell describes, these women create *Jessica, The Book of Jessica*, and Jessica through this grueling process that neither of them quit (Campbell and Griffiths, *Tape 1*). The nuanced difference Maria touches on becomes clear with her challenge to Griffiths to become "a different kind of thief" (Campbell and Griffiths, *Tape 2*). Nolan asserts, "I do not think there is a more honest, painful, illuminating chronicle of the abyss between First Nations and settler descendants than *The Book of Jessica*" and in an interview Griffiths recalls receiving a call from Lenore Keeshig-Tobias who "said, 'Thank you for your offering'" (Nolan, *Medicine Shows: Indigenous Performance Culture* 22; Jacklin 129). These responses demonstrate that the shattering process these women undergo created the start of a healing process, a way forward together.

Campbell discusses in *The Book of Jessica* her perception of art as a tool for healing. She says, "If you're an artist and you're not a healer, then you're not an artist — not in my sense of what art is. Art is the most powerful . . . it's the main healing tool. The

artist in the old communities was the most sacred person of all (Griffiths and Campbell, *Book of Jessica* 83-84). Jacklin argues that Campbell's insistence "that writing should 'give back', is in fact one of the most significant in terms of protocols guiding collaborative Indigenous life writing" (7). As Nolan argues, "even so early on, Maria saw the potential for theatre to be medicine" (*Medicine Shows: Indigenous Performance Culture* 21). Indeed, Campbell's gift to her community is the giving of her story to this play, acknowledged when Vitaline tells Jessica that being taken back is a "great gift" ("Jessica" 125). Ultimately, what that gift provides is Jessica finding her name and her voice.

Through her journey, Jessica's experiences hint towards the final moment in the play of this title character finding her power song. Just before the ceremony begins Vitaline teaches her student: "Open your heart to them [the spirits], don't hold back" (124). Having summoned these spirit animals, Jessica then communicates with the "Grandmothers and Grandfathers," telling them, "I remember a long time ago when you asked me to sing, no, you told me I would be given a song, that I would find one" (124). However, she remains without this power, her throat closed and choking. She laments: "when I throw my head back to . . . to make the leaves come on the trees, there's nothing but a rasping sound. . . . I can't go back and I can't go forward. Hear me, I'm asking you to help me" (124). It is only after this speech that the spirits "accept the ceremony" and Crow affirms they should "take her back" (124). Jessica revisits moments of her life which are based loosely on Campbell's experiences and becomes the focus of the play.

Her journey leads her towards finding strength and her power song. After Jessica has been with her friend and fellow sex worker Liz and two clients, the two women find themselves alone together, speaking about “the earth and the moon and the grandmother” (136). They come to the subject of freedom which turns into a melody. Alas, when Liz “*drops back, letting JESSICA’s voice rise,*” Jessica stops singing and the former becomes frustrated, saying: “It’s your fucking song” (136). Coyote says, “[*helpfully*] That was pretty good, almost worked” (136).⁷⁵ Liz tries to help Jessica find her strength, even telling her “If I had the kind of electricity around me that you have, I wouldn’t be shooting the Lady [heroine]. I’d be talking to her” (140). Nonetheless, Jessica remains unable to sing her song during her time with Liz. In these moments, Campbell’s experiences clearly are the driving force behind this character’s journey towards finding her self. Ultimately, Jessica’s time with Liz becomes represented by the Unicorn, played by the same actor, as well as a “stuffed animal from Zellers” (123). This “*stuffed unicorn*” becomes part of Jessica’s bundle for the ceremony (143). Although Jessica’s journey does not end here, her time with Liz provides her with further strength to use in this attempt to find her power song.

The next section of Jessica’s journey focuses on her relationship with Sam and intensifies Wolverine’s sinister stalking. Vitaline confides in Sam, “She has to let the

⁷⁵ The actor who plays Vitaline also acts the part of Coyote. Similarly, Bear and Sam are played by the same actor, as are Wolverine and Bob, as well as Unicorn and Liz (115). The doubling of characters and spirits furthers the depiction of both Jessica’s physical life and her spiritual one.

Wolverine inside” describing him as “something wild that could save you both” (169). Significantly, until this moment the Wolverine has been a spirit to fear. The first act’s final line is Wolverine’s: “Just keep her alive for me” (146). This ominous sentiment continues to underlie the action in act two, demonstrated by the Wolverine’s stirring while Jessica remains protected by Vitaline, Crow, and Unicorn at this early stage of her transformation (147). Similarly, Wolverine repeats the ominous line “Just keep her alive for me” after Crow tells him “She’s not ready for you yet” (151). This feeling of being stalked by Wolverine aligns with Griffiths’s recollection of the process in *The Book of Jessica*: “every day Paul would ask me to do the Wolverine, and every day I would say, ‘Not yet.’ It was rare for me to refuse to do anything” (38). It seems that Campbell’s teachings about Wolverine, an animal to be feared, impacts both Griffiths’s process in creating the play and becomes part of Jessica’s journey.⁷⁶

Campbell and Griffiths speak about how they were both impacted by Griffiths’s eventual powerful embodiment of this spirit during the creative process. Griffiths describes the moment when she felt ready to embody Wolverine: “I could feel it coming, I was already half wolverine. . . . Crouching down, arms outstretched, head up, I bared my teeth and hissed” (38). In *The Book of Jessica*, Maria’s words interject to explain her

⁷⁶ In “The Wolverine” (37-41) Campbell shares what her father taught her: “I’d heard my dad talk about wolverines on trapline and how trappers dread them. If they are caught in a trap and haven’t chewed their leg off before you arrive, they will fight you to the death. If they manage to get away they won’t leave the area, they will stalk you, watching, waiting, then they’ll foul your trapline so that all other animals will move out; they’ll go into your cabin and do the same thing, as well as rip and tear everything apart. They will, and can, ruin you. When you looked out at us, that was the wolverine I saw. I was freaked right out. . .” (39).

experience of watching Linda: “I knew something was happening. . . . It’s like knowing when there’s a Warrior walking in I could feel it coming with you . . . when you started I saw the Wolverine, I saw his teeth, his claws . . . it wasn’t you. I never saw you, and it was freaky” (39). A document titled “ORIGINAL WOLVERINE IN EDMONTON FOR ‘JESSICA’” remains with Linda Griffiths’s papers from this project. Beginning “(she walks along),” the transcript initially contains a sanguinary flow of consciousness: “Why can I hear the sound of tearing flesh? What are you eating? Why can I hear the sound of blood dripping on grass?” (Griffiths and Campbell, *Original Wolverine* 1).⁷⁷ Soon after, he goes into a state of visceral avarice: “I want it, give it to me, I want it, give it to me, I want it. . . . Just give it to me, no not a bit of it, all of it, so they will admire me. Let me take and take and take and take” (Griffiths and Campbell, *Original Wolverine* 1–2). This early iteration of Wolverine contains similar notions to the final *Jessica* script and to Campbell’s sentiments about Griffiths in “Spiritual Things:” “I used to expect her to begin oozing blood while we were in rehearsals, because there was nothing else coming out . . . I wanted to heal her. Overtime I’d feel like that, she’s jump on the stage and she’s play it all back, and I’d stand there feeling like she’d stolen my thoughts. She’d just take it all” (15). Furthermore, the final line of Griffiths’s first play with Wolverine reads “I’m waiting and I don’t wait long,” similar to the refrain in *Jessica* as well as the developed feeling of being stalked by this spirit (Griffiths and Campbell, *Original Wolverine* 3). The

⁷⁷ Wolverine has a similar line early on in *Jessica*: “[*stalking the UNICORN*] And I’ve wanted to hear the sound of blood dripping on grass....A spell made of unicorn spit. Taking us over, like they took us before...piss on the white pockmarked ghosts in tall ships” (124).

existence of this transcript and the similarities between it and the play text suggest that although the tape of Griffiths's first portrayal of Wolverine has been lost, it did influence the creation of *Jessica*. How both Campbell and Griffiths feel about Wolverine during the process importantly affects Jessica as well.

Finally, tucked in with other early drafts of *Jessica*, this transcript also contains a similar line to what Wolverine speaks before transforming into Bob. Although the spirits have protected Jessica throughout her journey, they finally "*back away*" as he "*moves toward Jessica*," suggesting the time has come for her to face this spirit. During the Edmonton improvisation Wolverine asks "How did she get away with it? Look what she's getting—for nothing! For nothing, she gives nothing, she heals no one—look what she's getting!" (1). This concept of nothing and nothingness takes a pervasive role in Wolverine's soliloquy: "Let her look in the mirror and see a face with no soul. Let her know nothing, no worth, not to walk the earth, no right, no reason, let the blood drip from her mouth," and so forth with these merciless and vicious sentiments (154). Interestingly, this theme of nothingness comes from Griffiths's own self-reflection during the creation of *Jessica*. She reveals to Campbell how she felt: "my privilege, my race, I felt ashamed for my race. But I also felt like . . . that I'd been given all these things, this supposed security and done nothing with it, or that I had given nothing. . . . You were nothing. You're nothing but a nothing. That's what the line is in that. You're nothing but a

nothing. You're not a thing at all" (Campbell and Griffiths, *Tape 5*).⁷⁸ Although Griffiths included portions of Campbell's life and her feelings during the play, she also writes from her own experiences, just as her collaborator had asked her to do. Wolverine, therefore, plays an incredibly important role both in the process and in the play.

In fact, it is not until Jessica "*transforms to*" Wolverine that she can find her strength (171). As the play concludes, Jessica terrifyingly embodies the Wolverine spirit, telling Sam and Vitaline, "I'll just piss all over your famous bed" and "I'll piss and foul your belief," respectively (168, 171). The final battle "Jessica/Wolverine" takes on is with Bob. With her hands around his neck, "[*h*]e is *choking, getting weaker*" until she "*breaks away, remembering the ceremony*" (173). Jessica is "*propelled toward*" Vitaline and "*the ceremony returns*" as the final scene of the play (173-74).

Now that Wolverine is "Inside" of her, each spirit leaves the circle and Jessica is able to see a figure: "Someone made of smoke, maybe it's a man, maybe it's a woman" (174). Vitaline invites her to "[l]ook closer," calls to the grandmothers and grandfathers, then demands of Jessica: "Call her now or you'll never see her again. Name her" (175). Jessica's journey comes to an end as she cries out "Jessica!" and sings her power song (175). The stage directions depict her starting with "*small sounds*" which "*lengthen as*

⁷⁸ In *Jessica* Wolverine's speech ends, "Revenge. Her claws tear the flesh of the face with no soul. Let us see what she is made of. Let her be nothing, a nothing, a nothing, not a thing at all" (Griffiths and Campbell, *Book of Jessica* 155). An echo of this nothingness comes through Griffiths's work, as seen in Chapter 3 during my discussion of her revisitation of these lines in *Alien Creature*. Jani Lauzon in 2019 expressed to me her belief that Griffiths was not responsible during the process of *Jessica*, but she became responsible overtime (Lauzon).

she births them. Extending and weaving, a melody emerges, searching for a peak. We breath with her until her call bursts through, triumphant" (175). In this moment, the audience comes along with Jessica as she finds her power. This final stage direction "demands a collaborative interaction between the play and the reader, a reading of mixed blood" (Hadfield 205). Griffiths also explains: "The idea was that repetition of the invocation accumulated power and strength each time it was spoken. All of the actors that play Jessica now, call on the strength of the previous Jessicas, so that they, in a way, become the grandmothers of the play itself" (53).⁷⁹ This final moment depicts Jessica finding balance which allows her to achieve her own power. However, the play's purpose is to create strength so it may be transmitted in the community formed from *Jessica*.

Indeed, Jessica experiences certain events that parallel Campbell's life, but she is also a different person.⁸⁰ This play is, once again, not a docudrama or a biography because Griffiths does not make these traumatic events into a piece of journalism. In "Spiritual Things," for example, Griffiths "was waiting for the courage to do the rape scene," (46) but in their conversation explains: "I thought of doing that for two months. Because I was angry too that it had been cut out of the book. When I heard that, I thought 'very important to the picture of this person' and if you were willing to write it, I was angry that somebody was going to say 'no. That's too far' or 'Somebody will be

⁷⁹ She also provides the song as it was originally sung, with a line-by-line translation, earlier in *The Book of Jessica* (53).

⁸⁰ Campbell's autobiographical *Half-Breed* was published in 1973. In it she recounts for her reader the events of her life, outlining these parameters early on, "I only want to say: this is what it was like; this is what it is still like" (9).

offended.' I was angry and I wanted it to be spoken out somehow" (Campbell and Griffiths, *Tape 5*). The first time Griffiths works on the rape scene in rehearsals she and Maria experienced an incredibly powerful and bonding moment. Griffiths recalls: "One day, in the darkness of the Backspace, I was Jessica, twelve years old, and two men came to the door" and she remembers not her performance but living this experience. She recalls the moment and expresses the connection it formed between her and Campbell:

I lay spread-eagled on the ground for a long time, hanging on the floor and sobbing. Then I curled into a ball, and from a cracked voice, came a lullaby: Tour a lour a laura. . . .' When I looked out into the room, Maria was gone. I found her standing behind the risers, tears rolling down her face. I was afraid to face her. . . . For once I was able to act instinctively around her, I just opened my arms. As we held each other, it was as if I'd unleashed my own memories. Not a story, or even acting, but something else. (46)

This "something else" can be explained by her conversation with Campbell about the lullaby. These women connect through another song, sharing this moment as co-creative collaborators and as girls whose mother sang the same lullaby: "Maria: You really did sing the song. Linda: My mother sang that song. Maria: My mother too. . . ." (46).

Through this difficult process and even while clashing with each other these two women made Jessica. She and *Jessica* are the product of these two women coming together and connecting. The process was grueling, and many of these moments are

represented in *The Book of Jessica*.⁸¹ While they constantly collide, they also experience many deeply connected moments when they think similar thoughts, perhaps stemming from their shared “energy,” as Griffiths describes (19). During the research phase of the project, Campbell brings Griffiths into her community. They go to a graduation of Indigenous teachers where “Maria [is] to speak” and “[t]here [is] to be a dance” (21). Campbell assures Griffiths was dressed appropriately; the latter as she “stood beside Maria, thought, ‘I could be one of her daughters’” (22). Maria agrees: “I thought that too. When I started taking her into the communities, I thought, ‘She could be one of my daughters’” (22).⁸² These women bonded as they travelled and worked together, transforming from sybil and subject to mother and daughter. A similar moment occurs in *The Book of Jessica* when Griffiths finds herself dancing “all by [her]self at the edge of the crowd, as Maria and her family watched and laughed. . . . but I didn’t care. I was no longer the oppressor, I danced away the oppressor” (23). Campbell reminisces similar sentiments about that same moment: “That was the first time I started to accept her . . . she danced and made us feel like she was our family, one of us. . . . It was like the first time I saw my kids get up and dance. . . . When she was dancing, I felt, ‘Yeah, I can talk

⁸¹ Indeed, the title appearing in consistent italics suggests that the book is about Jessica the character, not *Jessica* the play.

⁸² Jacklin observes: “The trope of adoption, of inclusion in family structure. . . . Implicit in this recognition, both early in the book and at the close of its sections of transcribed dialogue, is the possibility that the giving and taking between these two women does not cease with these pages” (138).

to her, she hears the same music that I hear” (23).⁸³ Campbell returns to vocabulary which indicates a maternal and familial sensibility within her relationship with Griffiths. Later in *The Book of Jessica*, Campbell speaks about the importance of this moment and of the rape scene: “The rape broke something inside, the dance healed, erased all the previous hurts of the rehearsal. After that, we started fresh again” (47).

Campbell and Griffiths come to an impasse that requires starting anew numerous times, but their pain and moments of intense connectedness create something with continuing importance for both of their communities. Susanna Egan, also pointing to this moment in the book when Campbell and Griffiths talk about “the song,” the lullaby, concludes “The relationship between the two women in the text refuses the oppositional and works instead towards a mutual recognition” (13–14). Although subsequent scholarship tends to be less critical of Griffiths, York disagrees with Egan’s statement, suggesting “it may be going too far” and alternatively argues that “[i]t may be more accurate to say that the text engages the oppositional and thus works towards a mutual

⁸³ Having grown up with a connection to Indigenous culture, I feel a visceral understanding of their shared moment in the circle of community created while Griffiths danced. I, too, have danced to the heartbeat of the big drum, travelling clockwise in a never-ending circle with individuals in regalia, traditional dress, and street clothes. I have grown up connected to the Chippewas of Rama First Nation through my mother’s involvement with the Mnjikaning Fish Fence Circle, a volunteer group comprised of bandmembers and interested people working to protect the history of the fish weirs located in the narrows between Lake Simcoe and Lake Couchiching. I continue to be connected to the Chippewas of Rama First Nation, of which my stepfather is a band member. I have associated with members of this community for decades, attended cultural events and spiritual ceremonies when invited, and my stepfather’s family has been a consistent part of my life for years. He is a Sixties Scoop child, removed from his family by the Canadian government and living through the healing of this trauma like far too many others.

recognition that is, I think, posited as a horizon but never achieved” (177). Certainly, looking at the information provided in the textual product of their work together, what is included in *The Book of Jessica*, I agree that this statement makes a fair point. As I quoted earlier, “The Red Cloth” ends with an ambivalent statement from Campbell. However, looking outside of this textual conclusion reveals that their continuing relationship demonstrates the purpose of this project.

Campbell says of their time together: “we’re writers, we’re artists—we have to tell people that stuff. People are going to laugh at us. They’re going to think we are a couple of kooks” (Campbell and Griffiths, *Tape 4*). However, she also speaks about wanting to make her audience feel “strong” and later touches on their new community:

MARIA. . . .But the point is that we’ve come through this whole process.

You’re still white; I’m still brown, but there is a community that’s born from there. But what you have to not do—and I don’t like preaching to anybody—is you have to not try and undo that.

LINDA. I can’t undo it.

MARIA. No. You can’t. But what I’m saying is it’s like when you’re . . . You know, once you realize that, you have to know, you have to accept that you’re not one of those people anymore.

LINDA. I do. I do Maria. I mean, maybe there’s a part of me . . .

MARIA. And don't apologize for it anymore because you'll never be one of those people anymore, no matter what you do. (Campbell and Griffiths, *Tape 6*)

Maria felt a responsibility to her community and formed a connection with Griffiths. Within the pages of *The Book of Jessica* there is no resolution, perhaps what Griffiths suggests with the final subheading: "Peace?" (112). However, the text does not conclude the collaboration between Campbell and Griffiths. As Linda tells Maria, "the story of the rehearsals never ends" (64). A community exists between Jessica, Maria, Linda, and all the collaborators including Tantoo Cardinal, Victor Ertmanis, Gary Farmer, Graham Greene, Tom Hauff, Susan Hogan, Tom Jackson, Makka Kliet, Monique Mohica, and "the circle of grandmothers" Campbell references who "had no colour," a vision tied to her continued perseverance with Griffiths, for her community (Griffiths and Campbell, *Book of Jessica* 17).⁸⁴ Focusing on the flaws of this text leave its important early work, surrounding the relationship between settlers and Indigenous people in Canada, unseen.

Avoiding a recuperative view, however, remains integral to this understanding of *Jessica*. As beautiful and moving as Nolan's words about Campbell and Griffiths are, I

⁸⁴ The bond between Jessica and Liz is also strengthened in alignment with this thinking. Jessica confides: "I got raped by a mountie when I was twelve" and Liz shares her story, too, "My stepfather did it to me when I was ten" (131). These two women connect by sharing their survivor narratives with one another. In fact, Campbell tells Doris Hillis, for example, that "in a character like Vitaline" there exists "part of me [Campbell], parts of Linda, parts of Tantoo Martin" (51).

must also note that although she ends a discussion about them with “This is how we go forward” there is no mention of *Jessica* or these women in the final chapter of her book. Instead, she speaks about Indigenous artists coming together at Full Circle’s annual Talking Stick Festival. She points to a 2013 “hopeful” and “celebratory” session as an example of the Indigenous theatre community continuing to grow (*Medicine Shows: Indigenous Performance Culture* 131). She also discusses the need for “more critical work . . . more Indigenous scholars, more writers, more people thinking about the work . . . more public discussions about the work” in addition to “increased recognition of Aboriginal art practices, increasing funding opportunities, resources, discourse, policy, and dedicated space” (131-132). She looks to the future. With *Jessica* she looks to the past, at this “act of resistance” that “opened a door that future generations of storytellers pushed through to occupy the stages that had heretofore disappeared for them” (*Medicine Shows: Indigenous Performance Culture* 31). Although *Jessica* plays an important role in the beginning of Indigenous theatre there remains in the collaboration of Campbell and Griffiths—and in theatre on Turtle Island—a great need for healing.⁸⁵ As Campbell answers when Griffiths asks “Is this whole thing a lie?”: “It’s not a lie, it’s just a wound

⁸⁵ As I edit this chapter, a blog post has recently gone up, written by Yvette Nolan: “When Donna-Michelle told me I was using Chapter 4, Colonization as Gendered Oppression, as a jumping off point for *Embodying*, I had to sit and think a long time. We all know the cost of colonization, but to have to drill down, to recognize that colonization was even more oppressive for women. . . I wondered how to deal with the knowledge without performing our trauma. How could I make this chapter into a way of healing? In the end, the art—the dance, the song—the resilience of women—the three women in the room who may have been driven there by the forces of colonization—in this case one of them uses the metaphor of the caribou fence—and the empowering of those women to make the choice to keep going, to be visible, and to be heard” (“Caribou Fence”).

we want to be healed sooner than is possible. Maybe it'll take a hundred years" (Griffiths and Campbell, *Book of Jessica* 112).

Jessica subsequently affects Maria Campbell moving forward. She explains to Jacklin in 2002 that she has a "very strong sense of ownership for *Road Allowance People*," the work she did after *Jessica* (131). "I don't even know if ownership is the right word for it. It's a sense of responsibility to those stories" (131). Nolan similarly argues that while "the experience of *Jessica* did not dissuade Maria Campbell from theatre" it did teach her a valuable lesson: "Native people need to have our own theatre where our stories and experiences are not mediated by non-Aboriginal powers" (*Medicine Shows: Indigenous Performance Culture* 22).⁸⁶ These considerations of Campbell's later work connect with how she envisioned her relationship with Griffiths after *The Book of Jessica*: "we'll have disagreements on stuff. But there will be disagreements coming from two positions of power" (Campbell and Griffiths, *Tape 4*). She speaks about a future in which "there's nothing wrong with having a strong argument or debate once you love each other and that . . . there's nothing . . . that it's not going to destroy you. Arguments or debates or disagreements are helpful and really healthy. If you don't do them, then they become unhealthy and then they go inward and they hurt you"

⁸⁶ In an interview published in 1988 Campbell makes a number of comments that prove Nolan's argument: "There are difficulties with trying to develop Native writers. First, our tradition is oral storytelling and, in a way, I feel we should hang on to that. But we don't have storytelling circles any more. So we need to write because times are changing. And then, for myself, if I'm going to grow as a writer, develop as a writer, I have to go back to my own people. I've learned a lot from non-Native writers, but my true development has come from exploring ways to work with my own language and culture" (52).

(Campbell and Griffiths, *Tape 4*). Despite the troubling elements of the text, there are many more important lessons to be found in the collaboration between these two women.

Campbell's gift and collaboration with Griffiths is not successful, but Nolan in *Medicine Shows* suggests it begins to uncover a way "forward" from such grievous mistakes of the past (130). Early in *The Book of Jessica* Griffiths includes Campbell's statement: "If she only knew how many times I wanted to tell her, 'Just take all your stuff and get out, you're white, you have no business here, I don't know why I invited you, I don't know why I ever thought that spiritual power was for both of us, go find your own spirits, your own power.' But every time I started to do that, I'd see a circle of grandmothers and the circle of grandmothers had no colour" (17). The two cultures in this collaboration can find a way to continue this work together. This play is, after all, "about a woman struggling with two cultures, and how she got them balanced" (17). An important part of this process that *The Book of Jessica* hints at, since these two quotes are found on the same page, is the balance Jessica finds as well as how this transfers to the audience, the larger community created by this collaboration.

Campbell's artistic work reflects the lessons she learnt during the process that created *Jessica*. Griffiths, who goes on to write eleven more plays, discusses this work with Jacklin in a 2002 interview exactly as Campbell does. Griffiths baldly points out, obviously aware of the critical discourse surrounding *Jessica*: "When academics write about the book, they always ignore what I've done since then—seven plays. Plays about abortion, royalty, poetry, illness. If they ever read them, they might understand something

about the continuing impact of my experience with Maria. I try to make sure that the best part of that learning continues” (13). The lessons Griffiths learns from Campbell while creating *Jessica* stay with her for the rest of her career. She often cites Campbell’s lesson that “All artists are thieves, but you have to give back tenfold” when she writes about the responsibility she feels in the creation of her art (“Process?” 60, see also “I Am A Thief”).

Griffiths’s conduct during this project is fueled by the context of collective creation methods. As Chester and Dudoward argue, “Maria’s lack of theatrical background created some of the misunderstandings with Linda,” although they do qualify their statement: “but not all of them” (168). Griffiths at this time is a young artist, relatively early in her career, whose foundation has been built on performing alchemy with the lives of real people to create a play using improvisation. Furthermore, her cultural differences with Campbell “present[] the collaborative process with a very challenging setting” (167). Perhaps this process provides a new perspective on the pitfalls of the collective creation process. Later in her career, Griffiths wrote an article entitled “I Am a Thief...Not Necessarily Honourable Either” about the biographical impulse of her canon. The title of this incredibly insightful article meaningfully references the discussion of honourable thievery she had with Campbell. In it Griffiths discusses *Jessica*, calling it “another weird twist” because it was “acting out the person it’s (sort of) about, while they’re in the same room” (Griffiths, “Thief” 301). She acknowledges that with this unusual format of collective creation in the presence of the “‘subject’ . . . you will always transgress. Whatever the subject thinks they have to give, it will always be more, it will

always hurt” (Griffiths, “Thief” 301). Almost twenty years after the publication of *The Book of Jessica* Griffiths still reflects on this example of process and how it impacts her later biographical work.

The lessons Campbell imparts to Griffiths stay with this actor-playwright throughout the rest of her career. Campbell asks, “So, what happened when you came back from New York?” and Griffiths reveals more about the impact this project had on her: “So, I was in New York and it always is *Jessica*, over my head” (Campbell and Griffiths, *Tape 3*). In fact in 1984, during the silent years of the project, Griffiths works as an actor “with Caryl Churchill on *Fen* at the Public Theatre in New York” (Bessai 232).⁸⁷ However, Griffiths goes into detail with Campbell regarding the extent to which *Jessica* overshadowed her work as an actor in this play. Griffiths describes her perception of *Fen* as “trying to reach into this [mystical] territory” which she felt *Jessica* was “reach[ing] way past” (Campbell and Griffiths, *Tape 3*). Ultimately, Griffiths “knew [she] had to rewrite” the project with Campbell even though she had agents phoning her, and she was “auditioning for films that would be shot in the south of France,” on a trajectory that “would lead [her] to a very serious American career” (Campbell and Griffiths, *Tape 3*). However, in her interactions with Churchill, Griffiths felt a desire to “connect with [her] as a playwright, not as an actor” and she confides in Campbell: “I was very off-centred there, weirded out by the situation and I wanted to talk theatre with

⁸⁷ Griffiths goes into detail with Campbell regarding the extent to which *Jessica* overshadowed her work on this play which was “being hailed by New York as the great new thing” (Campbell and Griffiths, *Tape 3*).

her. I wanted to talk writing. I wanted to talk women stuff. I didn't want to talk about my part" (Campbell and Griffiths, *Tape 3*). Despite being convinced that her career path is "moving to New York," Griffiths feels she "had *Jessica* right there. You know? And the more I did this play of Caryl Churchill's, the more I thought about *Jessica*, and the more we connected . . . the more I wanted to connect with [it] as a playwright, not as an actor" (Campbell and Griffiths, *Tape 3*). Ultimately, Griffiths returns to Canada, knowing "it was to do 'Jessica'" even though she does not immerse herself in the work immediately (Campbell and Griffiths, *Tape 3*).

It is at this point in her career that Griffiths begins to entirely dedicate herself to her work in Canadian theatre as she finds employment less frequently outside of this community.⁸⁸ The next section of her career takes place during the 1990s and contains four plays, none of which are explicitly biographical, although together they demonstrate Griffiths's turn towards working with women on and off the stage. As she transforms from an actor in collectives, to collaborative actor/playwright in *Maggie & Pierre*, and finally collaborative writer with *O.D. on Paradise* and *Jessica*, Griffiths is developing her own concept of process and product. In this next phase of her career she works each time with small casts and with a theatre practitioner who is a woman to tell stories that focus both minutely and universally on women's experiences, at the same time deepening her connection with her audience.

⁸⁸ During the 1980s Griffiths starred in numerous filmed pieces: *Reno and the Doc* (1984), *Samuel Lount* (1985), *The Marriage Bed* (1986), *Sword of Gideon* (1986), and *Mama's Going to Buy You a Mockingbird* (1987).

A small portion of her conversation with Campbell demonstrates the first step of this transformation. Campbell observes, “People don’t want to talk about their stuff because they think their stuff hasn’t got any power. That’s where power comes from. . . . If you have your recent history, if you can find your recent history, the old history, the ancient would all make sense” (Campbell and Griffiths, *Tape 6*). Linda agrees,

That’s how I serve my community. . . . And all I promise to my community. I don’t know how many people follow the work that I do. You know, lots of people saw *Maggie & Pierre*, fewer saw *O.D. on Paradise*, some people have seen *Jessica*. Some people will see *The Darling Family*. But few people would actually . . . bond. This sounds stupid, but I’m a community worker, too. . . . I’m less likely to say it than you are. I’m more likely to say I’m a writer, I’m an actor. But underneath, I think my audience knows this incredible responsibility I feel to them, and to us. . . . What I care is to empower my people with the knowledge that we are absolutely bloody fascinating in that we are undefined, in that we are in this kind of ghost land. (Campbell and Griffiths, *Tape 6*)

The conversations that led to *The Book of Jessica* provide many opportunities for Griffiths to explore her role as artist thanks to Campbell’s insightful teachings and questions. Griffiths reaffirms her dedication to telling Canadian stories and creating for her community.

Therefore, *The Book of Jessica* creation process spans the entirety of the 1980s and greatly impacts how Griffiths moves forward as she continues creating with the

lessons from each mentor in mind, as well as her own sensibilities. She continues to think about the amnesia that proves the bookends of *Maggie & Pierre*, telling Campbell, “It’s like this giant amnesia and this shame that there is no power here. That’s why we’re [Canadians are] constantly in between everybody else” (Campbell and Griffiths, *Tape 6*). She also considers how each play during this period connects with her dedication to exploring Canadian stories: “why I knew that I had to find out about native people is because I stood on the ground and I did a story about Quebec and I did a story about the Prime Minister and I did a story about the pioneers and where they were from. . . . I looked, constantly looked, for the power of the people on the ground where I was born” (Campbell and Griffiths, *Tape 6*). Indeed, not only does she search for these stories but also plays with her role as actor-playwright within them. Griffiths thus reveals in these insightful moments how her work on and dedication to *Jessica* begins to guide the trajectory of her life and career.

The inappropriate nature of this collaboration simultaneously stays with Griffiths. During the process of creating *Jessica*, the naivete of Griffiths performing as *Jessica*, this actor-playwright internalizes the sense of having a creative project go awry. Ultimately, an analysis of *The Book of Jessica* requires a stepping away from viewing the textual product as an object of authority. Likewise, Griffiths finds herself in a moment of lived experience that requires a negotiation of herself as actor and as playwright very differently than previous processes. In “Process?” Griffiths concludes the section on this piece by describing the published text as an “end result” which “is a combination of

narrative, argument and dialogue, with the play as the final third of the book” (60). She also points out: “The only example I know of a Native woman and a White woman going through the whole thing—personal, political, creative. Process at its most raw, powerful and painful. When *The Book of Jessica* came out, it sold all over the world and cost us both the personal earth” (60). Griffiths dedicates years of her career to this project. She creates Jessica through her body as an actor and transitions to working alone in her “attic” on rewrites (60). At the same time, this piece stands apart from anything else she creates. More than a text to analyze within the through lines of Griffiths’s career, it more represents lived experience that affects her creative identity and thought process long-term.

Griffiths subsequently creates as an artist whose perception of her work has been impacted drastically by having Campbell as a teacher during this formative time in her transformation between actor and playwright. Campbell describes her thoughts surrounding Griffiths’s journey through the creation of *Jessica*, “she’s got to feel like a piece of raw meat to go through something like that. That has to hurt” (Campbell and Griffiths, *Tape 5*). She respects this state and the space her collaborator asks for because she knows “what it feels like to be raw meat” (Campbell and Griffiths, *Tape 5*).

However, just as “*JESSICA enters the cabin, her insides shredded like raw meat*” (119) but ends the play having found her power, these two women survive to create *Jessica*, *Jessica*, and *The Book of Jessica*. Campbell told Griffiths she felt “that whatever it is, is resolved. What it is *Jessica* did is done and this [their conversations] is all we’ve got left

to do” (Campbell and Griffiths, *Tape 3*). This project holds an important place in the evolution of Indigenous storytelling on Canadian stages. As Griffiths notes with Jacklin: “Whether the project should exist at all is another question” (9). However, it does exist and contains within it Maria Campbell’s incredible, powerful will to survive and to use these experiences to strengthen her community. In fact, Campbell expresses her dream: “if people can . . . read my stuff or somehow we can sit and talk to people and they come away feeling ‘Hey, that’s my sister’ instead of going away saying ‘Boy, is that woman far out’ . . . then that’s a community worker” (Campbell and Griffiths, *Tape 6*). She has this same hope for those who read *The Book of Jessica*, telling Griffiths: “We have to talk to the people that are going to read these pages. They’ll understand. . . . I mean, they understood what *Jessica* was about. They went away crying. They understood. They understand” (Campbell and Griffiths, *Tape 4*).⁸⁹

At the same time, when I met Maria Campbell in-person in the fall of 2019 she declined speaking with me further about this project. From our interaction I understand that Campbell has long moved on from this collaboration. She continues to create Indigenous theatre. Our encounter was after a sold-out night of Native Earth Performing

⁸⁹ This section of their conversation is titled “Healing” in *The Book of Jessica*. It ends with Campbell’s statement, “We have to talk to the people that are going to read these pages. They’ll understand. They’ll know what we’re talking about. They will. They understood what *Jessica* was about. They went away crying. They understood. They understand. When we listen to somebody sing a song, we understand. Every single little time that somebody reads a word in here that makes them feel good, it means we made them a little bit stronger . . . and we make ourselves a little bit stronger” (Griffiths and Campbell, *The Book of Jessica: A Theatrical Transformation* 103).

Arts' Weesageechak Begins to Dance ("Thursday November 14"). That night I saw two solo pieces: Christopher Mejaki performing in his *You the Guy?* and Cole Forrest's *The Heels of Our Grandfathers*. A group of actors also previewed Ed Bourgeois's *River of Blood*. Finally, a group of performers embodied *Tapwewin-Her Inquiry*, "[a] response to the ongoing, frustrating MMIWG inquiry" created by Maria Campbell, Yvette Nolan, Marilyn Poitras, and Cheryl Troupe ("Thursday November 14"). This piece "opens the inquiry to the voices who are not being heard: the teenager who was taken by North-West Mounted Police (NWMP) in the 1800's to service the man; the midwife who was vilified by the priest run out of the church; the women who work the streets" ("Thursday November 14"). Campbell at the outset of *Jessica* seeks the healing possibilities in theatre. Decades later she "is a Cree-Métis writer, playwright, filmmaker, scholar, teacher and elder," a Grandmother of the Indigenous theatre community who continues to work together with Indigenous theatre practitioners, creating healing theatre ("Thursday November 14").

Chapter 2 Playing with Form, Process, and the Audience

She tells a tale of love, betrayal, and hedonism, but above all, she tells a tale of the theatre.

—Linda Griffiths, *Spiral 3*

Griffiths's experiences while creating the first three plays of her career, *Maggie & Pierre* (1980), *O.D. on Paradise* (1983), and *Jessica* (1986), have permeated her identity and perspectives about her artistry. Maria Campbell speaks to Griffiths often during their conversations about the latter's work as an artist and, more specifically, about the responsibility that comes with taking on this role. In *The Book of Jessica* there is the oft-quoted "You can't be honourable if you are a thief" (Griffiths and Campbell, *Book of Jessica* 83). Campbell also explicates that although the majority of art steals without responsibility, "[r]eal, honest-to-God true art steals from the people. It's a thief . . . but then it gives it back to you and heals you, empowers you, and it's beautiful" (Griffiths and Campbell, *Book of Jessica* 83). Earlier, she asks Griffiths: "Passe Muraille was known to be a political theatre—how could you be political without knowing your own stories?" (Griffiths and Campbell, *Book of Jessica* 83). Diane Bessai foresees Campbell's impact upon Griffiths in the final line in her chapter on the latter, "With Maria Campbell as mentor, *Jessica* represents a considerable growth in the experimental directions that Griffiths' experience in collective creation initiated" (241). Just so, in this next phase of

her career Griffiths rededicates herself to creating responsible art while knowing and telling her “own stories.”

Certainly, Griffiths has always used her research and her experiences as a foundation for creativity and performance. *Maggie & Pierre* is inspired by her draw to performing Pierre Trudeau during the creation of *Les maudits Anglais*, while her empathetic connection to Margaret Trudeau helps to form Maggie the character, and she uses Henry, as well as the other characters, as a vehicle for her own perspective to be included in the play. The inspiration behind *O.D. on Paradise* similarly comes from her time on vacation, although she creates space between herself and the production by not performing in it and accepting other work while it runs. Finally, *Jessica*, created using well-established collective creation methods, expresses the actor’s perspective rather than keeping distance. Campbell’s teachings and Griffiths’s varying involvement during each piece seems to leave Griffiths on artistic ground built by an education that she has experienced very differently through this process. The stories in *Maggie & Pierre*, *O.D. on Paradise*, and *Jessica* come through Griffiths as an improviser, writer, and performer while she transformed between actor and playwright. However, these transformations lead her through feelings of being “raw meat,” as Campbell describes her collaborator and as Griffiths writes into *Jessica*, because this story is certainly not one she can claim as her own (Campbell and Griffiths, *Tape 5*; Griffiths and Campbell, *Book of Jessica* 119). Therefore, upon entering the next phase of her career, Griffiths returns to the

fundamental aspects of creating theatre through herself and her experiences in order to recalibrate her artistic focus and methods of creation.

Three foundational aspects of her theatrical creation intertwine: her role as actor/playwright, the process she uses to develop her art, and the form of the final product. These elements differently enable Griffiths's storytelling. In addition, she begins to incorporate a fourth component, the audience. Much later, interviewer Kathleen Gallagher asks Griffiths, "And your audiences know what they want?" to which Griffiths responds with a resounding "Oh, yes," explaining, "And that's great. They know what works. When you hear that dead feeling in the room, or a lot of shuffling, coughing, and Halls Menthol Eucalyptus, you know you have to look at that part again. It's not specific what they want, they just don't want to be bored and I'm determined not to bore them. I want to challenge them" (Griffiths and Gallagher 125). During this stage of her career Griffiths plays with variations on each facet of her artistry and begins to create her own theatre, *The Theatre of Linda Griffiths*.

The charged stage directions of *Spiral Woman and the Dirty Theatre*, which serve as epigraph to this chapter also set the scene for this period of Linda Griffiths's career. She premieres four plays from 1991 to 1993.⁹⁰ On January 15, 1991, *The Darling Family: A Duet for Theatre* opens, starring Griffiths as SHE and Alan Williams as HE, in the Backspace of Theatre Passe Muraille. That spring, Griffiths performs *A Game of*

⁹⁰ The dates which follow differ from certain existing previous publications of these texts. Please see Notes to the Text for a discussion of these chronological discrepancies.

Inches, her first solo show since *Maggie & Pierre*, in the same space at Theatre Passe Muraille. Travelling outside of her two theatre homes, 25th Street House Theatre and Theatre Passe Muraille, *Brother Andre's Heart* premieres at Crow's Theatre in March 1992. Finally, she performs another solo show, *Spiral Woman and the Dirty Theatre*, at Theatre Passe Muraille in May 1993. Griffiths premieres four new plays in less than two and half years, starring in three. They are incredibly varied; yet, by examining traces of Griffiths's process thanks to archival documents surrounding *The Darling Family*, *A Game of Inches*, and *Spiral Woman and the Dirty Theatre*, I argue that Griffiths as actor-playwright performs and writes these tales in a way that establishes her unique methods of process as well as her own form of theatre.

2.1 *The Darling Family: A Duet for Three—Transforming Lived Experience*

The Darling Family: A Duet for Three premieres in the Backspace of Theatre Passe Muraille on January 15, 1991. There is no director, although Griffiths ascribes dramaturgy of the “workshop version” to Clarke Rogers and she credits Alan Williams as dramaturge of the “production” (Griffiths, “Darling” 146). Lighting is designed by H. Y. Fung and Sandra Balcovske acts as stage manager (“Darling” 146). This premiere features Alan Williams as HE and Linda Griffiths as SHE. The premiere version of the script has been published by Blizzard Publishing both as a single play (1991) and in the collection *Sheer Nerve* (1999), although each is out of print at the time of this writing.

In “Who Is She? A Subjective Assemblage on Linda G.” Daniel MacIvor speaks about *Heaven Above, Heaven Below*, the sequel to *The Darling Family* that premieres in 2013. As he shrewdly describes it, “Linda played a character called only SHE in a verbal pas de deux with a man called only HE. We all knew who he was of course. Or thought we knew. He was Alan; he was Layne. Was he Clarke, the other Daniel?” (“Who Is She?” 78–79). MacIvor expands his characterization of the sequel as a “poetic verité, taken into an imagined future. Pure invention, but rooted in something real” (“Who Is She?” 79). Hinting at the nonfictional roots of the fictional *The Darling Family*, MacIvor’s observations about both the play’s inspiration and its form touch on the play’s significance to Griffiths both personally and professionally.

Griffiths begins work on *The Darling Family* in the summer of 1987. Drawing inspiration from a real event, Griffiths writes a letter dated the 4th of August 1987 which she begins by musing on its future, “This is the kind of letter you sometimes write but don’t always give to our friends at Canada Post” (Griffiths, *Unsent Letter*). She predicts: “It will end up permanently in my ‘Letters’ disc, to be kept in a box, found after my death” (Griffiths, *Unsent Letter*). Yes, Linda, I found it. As she predicted she never sent this letter, although it did find its way onto paper and into the Linda Griffiths *fonds* in the same box that holds numerous drafts of *The Darling Family: A Duet for Three*. This

letter, along with other archival documents, reveals that categorizing this play with Griffiths's other pieces of fiction overlooks its roots in the real.⁹¹

I begin with MacIvor's astute observations for this reason. I consider how *The Darling Family*, like its sequel, plays with artistic classifications which provides insight into Griffiths's methods of creation. She forms the plot and characters out of her lived experience while the title "The Darling Family" alludes to the tale of Peter Pan.⁹² Moreover, this play is a "verbal pas de deux," yet the subtitle "A Duet for Three" contradicts the presence of the two actors on stage.⁹³ Finally, *The Darling Family: A Duet for Three* is "poetic verité," fact transformed into fiction, a verbal dance, and exploration of two characters; it "emerge[s] through the very process of [theatre-]

⁹¹ While this project is certainly not Griffiths's biography, the intersections between her life and art resonate with Sherrill Grace's observation that "any biographer worth her salt knows the importance (and the seductive dangers) of autobiographical materials like letters, diaries, journals, and personal memoirs" (Grace, "An Introduction" 17). At times these biographical materials from the Linda Griffiths fonds provide great insight into Griffiths's life as well as her art.

⁹² The references to Peter Pan have more to do with this narrative than just the title. This play is a fiction, but these references also suggest that the ideal family is a fiction. Additionally, just as Peter Pan never grows up, the final line of the play, "Are we grown up now?" suggests the journey is also about SHE and HE becoming responsible adults (179). The title, therefore, also seems to have the subtext of the darling nature of having a baby, of comments such as "isn't the baby darling," but the decision to have a child, to take on the responsibility of raising a child, is so much more.

⁹³ A "pas de deux" in *The Oxford Dictionary of Dance* is defined as "A dance for two, a duet . . . The classical pas de deux follows a traditional pattern: an entrée and adagio for the ballerina and her cavalier, a variation for the male dancer, a variation for the female dancer, and a final coda which reunites the partners" (Craine and Mackrell). Here, MacIvor transforms this dance term into one that applies to Griffiths's live staged conversation between two partners.

making,” to also play with a definition of cinéma vérité (Kuhn and Westwell).⁹⁴

Significantly, to develop this robust and meaningful script Griffiths both writes *The Darling Family* and returns to creating as an actor.

Griffiths appears in her biographical plays as playwright-performer. Susan Bennett theorized this relationship in “Performing Lives: Linda Griffiths and Other Famous Women” as “not just the biographizing impulse of Griffiths’ writing but, more specifically, her desire to bring these women (back) to life in her own embodied performance” (Bennett, “Performing Lives” 25–26). Focusing on Griffiths’s writing and performance of Margaret Trudeau (*Maggie & Pierre*), Wallis Simpson (*The Duchess*), and Gwendolyn MacEwen (*Alien Creature*), Bennett’s project astutely considers Griffiths’s work as “not just life-writing, then, but life-performing” (Bennett, “Performing Lives” 26). However, eighteen years separate Griffiths’s embodiment of Margaret Trudeau (1980) and Wallis Simpson (1998), a curious pause for Griffiths to take considering that biography is the subject and genre for which she has become best-known. Consequentially, the recovery of Griffiths’s process of transforming her lived experience into the fictional characters of *The Darling Family* reveals her “ongoing

⁹⁴ *A Dictionary of Film Studies* defines “cinéma vérité” as “A style of participatory or interventionist documentary filmmaking facilitated by the widening availability, from around 1960, of light, portable cameras and sound-recording equipment” (Kuhn and Westwell). The definition goes on to discuss *Chronique d’un été* in which the makers Touch and Morin “[f]ar from seeking objectivity . . . felt that truths beneath the conventionalist of daily life emerge through the very process of filmmaking, and that the camera’s presence should act as a catalyst, encouraging subjects to open up” (Kuhn and Westwell). With this observation MacIvor discerningly transposes a filmmaking term onto Griffiths’s process of writing for the theatre.

fascination . . . with the dramatization of the lives of well-known women” does not take a hiatus (Bennett, “Performing Lives” 25). This play reflects her continued work “[t]o counterpoint the sweeping narratives of mainstream history” in the creation of art (Bennett, “Performing Lives” 25). Indeed, *The Darling Family* relates to auto/biography although Griffiths has not yet arrived at this genre, instead transforming her own stories into fiction.

The Darling Family’s plot is deceptively simple. Two characters, called only HE and SHE, discuss an unplanned pregnancy. Tellingly, in the existing critical conversation surrounding this play each scholar provides a marginally different description of her object of study. Shelley Scott, for example, considers the multiplicity of themes brought into the conversation between HE and SHE: “The audience participates in a couple’s emotional journey: SHE wants them to explore every aspect of her unplanned pregnancy, to keep talking until it becomes clear, not so much what they should do, but what they’re supposed to learn from it” (“Sheer Nerve [Book Review]” 87). In the first publication on this piece (1991) Kym Bird summarizes it as “a woman-centred piece, relentless in its focus on whether or not ‘She’ will have an abortion and the struggle over the implications and consequences of that decision” (40). Similarly, in the most recent publication on *The Darling Family*, Ann Wilson (2018) describes the play as “a two-hander that dramatizes the discussion between two characters identified as ‘SHE’ and ‘HE,’ as they decide whether or not to terminate an unplanned pregnancy” (51). Within her summary, each scholar covers numerous elements that emerge from the core plot of a couple’s

conversation about their unplanned pregnancy. The characters' emotional journey constitutes the arc of the narrative, while SHE and HE also seek answers to profound questions relating to spirituality, parenthood, women and women's issues, all relating to the question of reproductive choice. Similar to Griffiths's statement that began my first chapter in which she lists the kaleidoscopic lens of *Maggie & Pierre*, *The Darling Family: A Duet for Three* also begs the question: What is the play about?

Griffiths predicted "I know people are going to say it is about abortion. There is nothing I can do or say that will change that. People will just have to come and see for themselves" (Rafelman C5). Each scholar similarly focuses her argument around the play's relationship with the spectator. Bird begins "He and She: Linda Griffiths' Gendered Family" by recalling Griffiths's and Williams's entrance as they move "through the steep, bleachered auditorium of Theatre Passe Muraille's Back Stage, dressed in street clothes and looking like any other members of the theatre-going crowd" until "[t]hey go too far; they cross the line between the audience and stage, their transgression signaling that they will perform" (39). Scott states that "the audience is aware of the inherent artificiality of *The Darling Family* as a play, but everything has been designed to focus on the actors and to suggest that the spectator will be engaged in an unusually unmediated, intimate experience" ("Bodies, Form and Nature" 202). Finally, Wilson cites this description in her article but builds on it by arguing that this intimacy provides the sense of a truth being revealed in contrast with "the references to J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* [that] serve as subtle, but consistent reminders that a play is

artifice, a medium that is characterized by pretending” (Wilson 51).⁹⁵ Indeed, Griffiths initiates this piece in order to explore her lived experiences, but transforms this early work both as a writer and as an actor when she steps in to play SHE for her audience.

In fact, the creative process that leads to *The Darling Family* begins during the first stage of Griffiths’s career, as she grappled with her place in the actor/playwright duality. In her interview with Judith Rudakoff included in *Fair Play: 12 Women Speak*, Griffiths retrospectively discusses *Maggie & Pierre*, *O.D. on Paradise*, and *Jessica* and strikingly expresses feelings of “ha[ving] to be the writer. Only the writer” (Rudakoff 26). She articulates her uncertainty surrounding this designation, “And I still don’t know if that’s right for me, to cross to one or the other sides of the actor-writer line,” but concludes that she has separated these two parts of her identity, explaining: “if I act in the pieces then I can’t be working on re-writing while it’s being rehearsed, which is a very important part of the process. And also, because I need to watch my plays in rehearsal. I need the distance” (Rudakoff 26). This statement, and quick debate about her artistic role, reveals that Griffiths’s grappling with her own role and relationship with the art she creates has not come to a conclusion with *The Book of Jessica*. However, having transformed from improvisational actor in the beginning of her career to playwright in

⁹⁵ Ann Wilson’s body of work is one I admire and rely on in my research and her arguments surrounding comparisons between Griffiths’s play and Barrie’s are insightful. However, I must note that when HE tells SHE, “I know this may sound corny but I think of it like the Darling family in Peter Pan, you know, the Walt Disney version? That Victorian house with the nursery?” they speak about the film and not the play (Wilson 61).

O.D. on Paradise, Jessica, and now *The Darling Family*, Griffiths explains her uncertainty about acting as a productive role.

Archival traces available in the Linda Griffiths *fonds* and the Theatre Passe Muraille collection, held at the University of Guelph, reveal the process that both Griffiths and the play undergo and how they align with this “distance” between herself and *The Darling Family*. Of the seventy boxes in Griffiths’s collection, eighteen contain materials pertaining to this project, which range from unreadable floppy discs, handwritten notebooks, and scattered documents to press and materials relating to the film adaptation. The materials most pertinent to this study are drafts of *The Darling Family: A Duet for Three* that reveal Griffiths’s inspiration from her own life.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Sherrill Grace in her plenary for the 2019 ACQL conference, “Lost and Found: Conversations within and about Archives,” addressed the ethics of archival work. She insightfully asked what to do with the “discomfort” in archives and articulated a sense of “overwhelming” responsibility that evoke what I feel every time I discover personal material in the Linda Griffiths *fonds* (Grace, *Lost and Found*). As discussed in the Introduction, there are over seventy boxes of material in her *fonds* that Griffiths held on to and that were given to the University of Guelph in 2015 after her death. Some of this material does contain private information. On the subject of using such personal material for scholarly purposes, Grace used the astute word “judicious” while considering the ethics of using such material. Layne Coleman has assured me that my research aligns with Griffiths’s hope for her work to receive further attention (Coleman, *Linda Griffiths - 1*). I hope my decisions to leave the majority of Griffiths’s personal material out of this study yet choosing to bring in what pertains to her art, is an example of judicious scholarship (*Lost and Found*). Multiple documents confirm the foundation of truth in *The Darling Family* and that the chronology derived from correspondence and on medical forms is also present in a draft of this play written nine days after the procedure. Most important to my decision is the letter with which I start this section, in which Griffiths predicts a researcher such as myself finding all of this information. To me it seems she chose not to make the truthful foundation of the play public, but was prepared for that reality to be made bare “after [her] death” (Griffiths, *Unsent Letter*). Therefore, I do consider certain personal details from the Linda Griffiths *fonds* in this chapter because it is important to her process. However, I only include that which directly pertains to the final version of the play.

Griffiths's inspiration for *The Darling Family* is significant because this play is her first to be grounded in her personal lived experiences. As her personal life intertwines with her artistic identity, Griffiths initially feels the need to maintain distance between herself and SHE, telling Rafelman that “[i]n the beginning, she felt that playing the female role herself would be a ‘trap’” (Rafelman C5). However, this piece is in process for many years, by the end of which Griffiths steps in as SHE.

The earliest draft of this play in the archives is an untitled document with a heading on each page that provides a date and time stamp: “July 12, 1987, 2:09 PM.”⁹⁷ The next available draft, dated February 17, 1988 seems to be the script taken to the “four-week independent workshop by The Laidlaw Foundation, under the direction of Nathan Gilbert” (Griffiths, *Darling* 7). This workshop features Ted Wallace and Jennifer Dale as HE and SHE with Clarke Rogers acting as dramaturge (Griffiths, *Darling* 7). Another copy of the 1988 script has additional handwritten notes, including “May” written by hand above the typed date, that suggest these are edits she makes coming from the workshop in June 1988.⁹⁸ Clearly a productive workshop, Griffiths thanks “the

⁹⁷ That Griffiths works on the draft script of *The Darling Family* beginning in 1987 uncovers a chronological alignment with her work with Campbell. A twofold meaningful overlap, this draft first relays the incredible weight that Griffiths faces in both her personal and professional life in 1987. Second, her desire to lean into her experiences in order to create a play can be linked both to her own tendency to bring herself to the theatre as well as Campbell's insistence that Griffiths tell her own stories.

⁹⁸ There is no concrete evidence to prove the exact dates of this workshop. However, two documents exist in the Linda Griffiths *fonds* that develop an approximate timeline. The first is without title or date but does discuss *The Darling Family* and foresees a “Development Stage May 7 to June 7 at 647 King St. West” (Theatre Passe Muraille, *The Darling Family: A Unique Production of a New Play* 2). The second is a document comprised of eighteen

participants for their invaluable contribution to the project” and continues in the first publication of *The Darling Family*, “The talent brought to bear and the wholeheartedness with which the piece was approached were a gift made in the highest spirit of the theatre” (Griffiths, *Darling* 7). The process, however, pauses for two years after this workshop while Griffiths the writer focuses on *The Book of Jessica*.

Griffiths returns to the project in early 1990 and re-evaluates the role she has had in its creation and performance. *The Darling Family* is workshopped at Theatre Passe Muraille for one week with Alan Williams and Linda Griffiths reading the part of HE and SHE (Griffiths, *Darling* 1, 7). Until this point Griffiths has written *The Darling Family* using a more traditional playwrighting process, taking a draft to a workshop for other actors to bring her words to life. Now, the draft dated January 3, 1990, is realized by Griffiths as actor. Finally, as Griffiths explains in the 1991 Blizzard publication, “[a] new idea of how to work on the play formed” and “[s]ix months later, the piece was previewed for ten days at the Second Stage of Prairie Theatre Exchange in Winnipeg, with Graham Ashmore as stage manager” (Griffiths, *Darling* 7). Griffiths does not explain the shift in process, but archival traces reveal that the draft dated October 2, 1990, just days after the final preview performance in Winnipeg, is the same script used for the premiere and that is published. These archival traces prove that Griffiths’s process for

printed pages, the first of which is titled “Notes and Fragments after ‘The Darling Family’ June Workshop” and dated June 22, 1988 (*Notes and Fragments* 1).

The Darling Family undergoes numerous stages of writing and workshopping, but only finds its final state once Griffiths steps in as actor to perform for an audience.

This prolonged creation period, along with substantial archival traces, provides the opportunity to trace how Griffiths's relationship with the text changes it. In fact, as she explores her place within the two roles of actor and playwright this play becomes decreasingly overtly personal. The most linear alteration to the successive drafts is SHE's similarity to Griffiths. Although Griffiths plays SHE in both the premiere of *The Darling Family* and the Cineplex film version, there are no indications in the final text of this character's autobiographical antecedent.

Contrarily, in 1987 Griffiths writes an incredibly personal piece that, although it is void of character or set description, has an overtly truthful narrative. This early draft has many narrative similarities to the final script, but its form resembles a first-person monologue since the speaker uses "I" throughout. This form indicates Griffiths's perspective at the time as an artist writing directly from her own lived experience. Nearing the end of this first draft, she includes a small remnant of her truth: "July 2, 1987" followed by "Tomorrow I will have the abortion, the 'procedure,' the right" (Griffiths, *Untitled Early TDF* 25). Also archived with *The Darling Family* drafts are two documents: pre- and post-operative care instructions for a procedure scheduled on July 3, 1987. This incredibly personal moment transitions the piece into its conclusion, a poem entitled "Before An Abortion" (Griffiths, *Untitled Early TDF* 26–27). Correspondence from 1987 reveals that at Griffiths's suggestion, she and her partner wrote poetry together

around this time. No evidence proves the origins of the poem in the 1987 draft, yet together these clues suggest its deeply personal genesis.

Griffiths fleshes out this monologue into a dialogical draft dated early 1988. It is the first to have the title *The Darling Family: A Duet for Three*. Also, unlike the original document and the published text, this next draft provides a character description for SHE: “Thirty four years old, an actress who is living on past glories and monies accumulated with an early success” and later, “She has suffered from ill health for several years” (Griffiths, *TDF Workshop Draft Feb 1988* 3). Just so, Layne Coleman’s description of Griffiths’s career trajectory starting with *Maggie & Pierre* reads, “You were swimming in celebrity, good notices, and money. The aftermath of that time gave you a bad back and many other illnesses you fought for the rest of your life” (Coleman, “Stage Time” 145). Therefore, this description of SHE clearly resembles Griffiths, and is nearly identical in the second draft from 1988 (Griffiths, *TDF May 1988 Draft* 3).

Interestingly, as the process continues and Griffiths steps in to play SHE, this unnamed character becomes less autobiographical. In both drafts from 1990, SHE’s character description is altered in ways that somewhat resembles Griffiths, but no longer mirrors the actor-playwright, “Thirty years old, an ‘underground’ stage actress now making a good living doing commercial voice overs. . . . Suffers from every kind of physical weakness, real and imagined” (Griffiths, *TDF Workshop Draft Jan 1990*; Griffiths, *TDF Oct 1990*). The character description is removed from the publication of

The Darling Family after the 1991 premiere, thereby pruning much of Griffiths's overtly autobiographical details from the published play.

The form of the play becomes less explicative in a trajectory that aligns with this reduction of autobiographical traces. For example, there is now a very short combined "Character and Setting" description in the publication. The characters receive only a few lines of vague introduction, "HE and SHE almost never fight, they are almost never mean, they are almost never snide" and so forth until the final point, "they almost never love" (Griffiths, *Darling* 9). Likewise, whereas originally there is a relatively full set there is now a minimalistic, bare set which receives a single sentence as description (9).

The final iteration of the play's form has received significant scholarly attention. Shelley Scott's argument about the effectiveness of *The Darling Family* finds its proof in this minimalism, that "a tension around the body onstage and the definitions of 'nature' it represents" is created by the "absence of . . . conventional markings of theatre" (Scott, "Bodies, Form and Nature" 202, 197). Bird's recollection of SHE and HE making their way onto the stage provides an important insight into how this play in performance collapses the distinction between core dualities of the theatre, audience/performers, performance/reality, stage/auditorium (Bird 39–40). Similarly, Ann Wilson's argument that "*The Darling Family* is a fruitful site for considering how truth is constituted in the theatre" first considers the minimalistic set in order to discuss the spiritual elements of the play (Wilson 51). The minimalist form of *The Darling Family* creates important meaning, as each scholar has proven in her argument.

Archival documents reveal that exploring innovative methods of presenting this play has been a foundational intention since the first workshop. In an explicatory document from this period, the reader learns that this is a “piece of theatre which attempts to further the form of theatrical presentation” (Theatre Passe Muraille, *The Darling Family: A Unique Production of a New Play* 1).⁹⁹ The set description in both 1988 drafts and the one dated January 1990 are identical. The performance space is “small, focused,” and contains “at least two spaces, ‘Her Place,’ and ‘His Place’” (Griffiths, *TDF Workshop Draft Jan 1990* 2). Each area consists of a bed and a telephone. Additionally, the script stipulates that “lights can pinpoint scenes, images” and gives “the handle of a telephone receiver [and] a face in the darkness” as examples. These design elements create a space in which “He [and] She can call to each other across some kind of abyss” (Griffiths, *TDF Workshop Draft Jan 1990* 2).¹⁰⁰ Therefore, at this stage in the process the divergent convictions of the two characters are visually represented by a complex and divided set design. The void between HE and SHE needs to be traversed by their voices, their conversation. Ultimately, the journey of the play requires the abyss be crossed so a

⁹⁹ Here, *The Darling Family* is described as “a unique production of a new play” with Griffiths as writer, Clarke Rogers as director, “set sculpture by Catherine Carmichael” and “starring Jennifer Dale” (Theatre Passe Muraille, *The Darling Family: A Unique Production of a New Play* 2). Therefore, this document pertains to the initial workshop as it is the only time all of these practitioners came together to work on this play. However, without a title, date, or author’s mark the origins or purpose of this document remain unknown.

¹⁰⁰ There is also a really interesting note that on “a large screen at the back of the set” there are to be projections of “drawings that he makes almost constantly throughout the play” although there are no descriptors to indicate the significance of this design choice (Griffiths, *TDF Workshop Draft Jan 1990* 2).

decision can be made about the pregnancy. This concept of *The Darling Family*'s set aligns and emphasizes the various thematic investigations of the script.

This experiment with form is meant to accompany the “language of the play,” described as “dense, repetitive, almost choral in nature” yet which “contrast[s] at times with fragments of realistic scenes” (Theatre Passe Muraille, *The Darling Family: A Unique Production of a New Play* 1). The drafts from 1988 and January 1990 once again contain a description with similar diction, although it is transferred to describing how the characters speak, “At times. . . in a kind of choral dialogue, at times they are entirely naturalistic” (Griffiths, *TDF Workshop Draft Jan 1990* 2). Later in 1990, Griffiths removes the insistence upon choral dialogue intermingling with naturalistic or realistic performance. Instead, the set is now “completely bare” with the exception of “a dish with sage in it, some matches and several crystals and tokens on the floor” (Griffiths, *TDF Oct 1990* 2). There are no visual traces of the abyss, but a note for the actors appears. They are to “face each other empty of props, circling round, until the lowering of an eyelid, the choice to look directly or indirectly at each other, is a moment of consequence. Neither leaves the stage during the play” (Griffiths, *TDF Oct 1990* 2). Griffiths transitions this play from a focus on language, to the characters, and finally to how the actors embody and perform the script as she similarly transforms between playwrighting and acting.

Strikingly, the design of the play is altered in this draft dated October 2, 1990, just two days after the final preview performance of *The Darling Family* in Winnipeg. In the invaluable “Process?” Griffiths explains that it is “written as a paper play” and that

despite the various workshops she and Williams “never rehears[e] the play until” performing in the previews in Winnipeg (Griffiths, “Process?” 60). She credits Williams with the suggestion to perform “it with no lighting, no sound and no set” (Griffiths, “Process?” 60). When he asks “How do you imagine this happening? I mean, what’s it going to look like?” her response is, “We’re just going to move when we feel like it” (Griffiths, “Process?” 60). Griffiths discovers the importance of the actors choosing their movements in the moment of performance (Griffiths, *TDF Oct 1990* 2). Griffiths and Williams do not work with a director during the Winnipeg previews or the Toronto premiere. The removal of mediators between the actors and the audience allows Griffiths as playwright to create a text that ensures connection in performance. Indeed, she perceives the “process [as] divided into writing and rehearsal,” although the latter clearly informs the former (Griffiths, “Process?” 60). *The Darling Family* is an exceptionally detailed and subtle yet robust script that requires an equally nuanced and skilled performance. The credits list numerous practitioners who are well-associated with Theatre Passe Muraille, but the text is foundationally rooted in Griffiths’s sensibilities as a playwright and actor immersed in her own process.

An analysis of the plentiful archival documents pertaining to *The Darling Family* proves that Griffiths’s process of transforming her lived experience into a piece of theatre as both actor and playwright affects the characters as well as the play’s form. The description of SHE initially resembles Griffiths, but as she embodies this character the resemblance is reduced and ultimately removed. Following a similar chronological

trajectory, the form of the play is envisioned as a stage with many interconnecting design elements created to support the language of Griffiths's script. Yet, the live performance of *The Darling Family* is altered beyond recognition once Griffiths decides to remove the distance between herself and the text by embodying SHE. The search for a complicated visual representation of the abyss between SHE and HE becomes focused on the language of the text and the performance of these characters, two elements of the play that relate to Griffiths's interconnected role of actor-playwright. Tracing the process of *The Darling Family* unearths the creation of two integral elements of Griffiths's theatre. While Griffiths shapes this play as both actor and playwright she also develops her connection with the audience as well as *thoughtspeak*. The latter is her own theatrical device which allows SHE and HE to express their thoughts aloud. At the foundation of *The Darling Family* is Griffiths connecting with her audience, an aspect she incorporates into the text and performance as both actor and playwright.

By compiling her recollections about the importance of the previews in Winnipeg, I argue that Griffiths discovers a way to rely upon her improvisational skills to connect with her audience in order to co-create each performance. The concept of finding performance style while acting in front of an audience explains Griffiths's statement that "[t]his production 'evolved from the inside'" in the Preface to the first publication of *The Darling Family* (Griffiths, *Darling* 7). Rather than rehearsing the play to perfection before bringing the finished product to the audience, Griffiths and Williams discover their performance in front of each audience. Furthermore, Griffiths says that she and

Williams “[a]s two actors, working without an outside eye . . . talked, argued and rehearsed without formal rehearsals until the play was presented to the audience. From the moment the play hit the audience, the blocking was inevitable” (Griffiths, *Darling* 7–8). By the premiere, Griffiths wants to tell the audience “OK, it’s you guys and us guys and we are going to go through something in the next hour and a half. Here we go!” (Rafelman C5). Therefore, Griffiths discovers how to work with her audience so they journey alongside SHE and HE in performance, an integral element of *The Darling Family*.

In an inverse correlation, as Griffiths increases her presence within the play as both actor and playwright she reduces the autobiographical content. However, even without this personal detail, Griffiths’s connection to and consideration of her audience increases. She tells Vit Wagner “I started to feel when I was watching plays . . . that I just wanted to rip away all this stuff—sound, lights—and say, ‘Okay, what have you really got here?’” on which he remarks, “There is no director, no set designer and a minimum of lighting. All it needs is an audience” (D3). Exactly so, as Griffiths strips away layers of theatrical convention she creates a final product that connects with the audience in every element of the performance. As Scott has also astutely observed, “The play itself is a process” which she believes to be “the progression of a relationship between two characters and the progression of the audience through the same emotional journey” (“Bodies, Form and Nature” 202). The audience witnesses their conversation, hears their thoughts, and journeys with SHE up to the moment she is anesthetized. Griffiths

eliminates her overtly personal details in the text, but this change does not impact the intimacy of the story, a result of her connection with the audience as actor and playwright.

Thus, removing the conventional markers of theatre from *The Darling Family* helps Griffiths to create a performance that connects HE and SHE more intimately with the audience. Griffiths also expresses in multiple interviews her desire to be “‘inclusive of an entire audience,’ saying ‘I love audiences too much to play to any particular one. My work is always conciliatory. I have never done a fuck-you play’” (Bird 40). In her interview with Bird, Griffiths specifically mentions a wide scope of women, “‘the Christian Fundamentalist, the woman who is seven months pregnant, and Pro-Choicer’” (40). Years later, in a discussion of the film adaptation of *The Darling Family*, she similarly recounts the preview performances in Winnipeg: “‘One time . . . we talked after the show with some of the people in the audience. And we found they included an eight-months-pregnant woman, a Christian fundamentalist woman, a man who’d been through the experience himself, a radical lesbian feminist and a really young guy’” (Mietkiewicz, “Darling to Be Different Is a Darling Quality in Film” B3). In these statements it becomes clear that although Griffiths writes a pro-choice play, she purposefully ensures that a variety of audience members, even those who feel uncertain about SHE’s and HE’s choice, can connect emotionally with their discussion.

One may argue this approach undermines the feminist project, even if SHE establishes “‘There’s no question about the basic rights’” (Griffiths, *Darling* 30). However,

a close analysis of *thoughtspeak* as a device and Griffiths's reliance upon it in *The Darling Family* uncovers Griffiths's revisioning of her theatrical voice. Scott relies upon Sherrill Grace's argument that "theatre always has 'an ideological meaning conveyed in forms which are never without socio-political purpose, whether that purpose is to replicate and conserve the status quo or to resist and replace accepted power structures'" (Scott, "Bodies, Form and Nature" 202). By creating such a minimalistic form for *The Darling Family* and doing so with the audience in mind, Griffiths crafts with great detail, as both actor and playwright, a narrative that maintains a decidedly woman-centred and pro-choice stance, yet one that does not preach to the converted. Griffiths removes everything from the theatre except the stage, the audience in their seats, the actors, the characters, and their conversation.

Theatrical devices enabling a character to contemplate, talk with herself, or speak to the audience abound in the form of soliloquies, monologues, and asides, among others. Griffiths, however, creates her own. Denoted by italics in the text, *thoughtspeak* allows characters to speak her or his thoughts aloud. Griffiths matures this device during the creation of *Age of Arousal* (2007), a play that foundationally relies upon this invention.¹⁰¹ In her "Playwright's Note" for this later piece Griffiths mentions "*The Darling Family*, where the subtext was so vital and in such contrast to the external text that it was spoken"

¹⁰¹ *Thoughtspeak* as a device coming into *The Darling Family* is certainly a significant aspect of the text, although in *Age of Arousal* Griffiths finds its full form and clearly articulates its purpose and her understanding of it. As such, please see Chapter 4 for an in-depth explication and exploration of Griffiths's contribution to stagecraft.

(Griffiths, *Age of Arousal* 9).¹⁰² This description touches on *thoughtspeak* as a method of uncovering the subtext in both the script and performance. Griffiths's process of creation through both her writer and actor self, paired with the development of this device, is what makes it significant and unique to her. Furthermore, her choice to call it her own creation denies any reliance upon existing forms that may, as Grace conveys, "replicate and conserve the status quo." Instead, *thoughtspeak* "replace[s] accepted power structures" by enacting a different ideological meaning behind these characters speaking their thoughts. In *The Darling Family* Griffiths reclaims the abyss by using *thoughtspeak*. Originally envisioned to be a creation of the set and the interplay between choral and naturalistic dialogue, Griffiths ultimately uses her own invention to write and perform the contrast between what HE and SHE say and feel.

Evidence of *thoughtspeak* as an integral device in *The Darling Family* lies in the moment when SHE and HE react to news of the pregnancy. In the piece from 1987, a monologue written from a woman's perspective, an implication of this draft being so close to Griffiths's personal experiences is that the partner does not speak for himself. Instead, she recounts his reaction, "He doesn't want it, I knew he wouldn't, of course not, it doesn't make sense, we've only been together three months, sometimes I don't like him

¹⁰² In fact, it seems that until this play Griffiths has not clearly articulated what the italics represent. This lag between Griffiths's creation and her explication of the device explains Scott's description of these "two nameless characters speaking to themselves and each other" and Bird similarly pointing to "[t]he shared language of inner dialogue" (Scott, "Bodies, Form and Nature" 197; Bird 41). Both scholars are right, but Griffiths's eventual naming and defining *thoughtspeak* helps to clarify the purpose of these sections.

at all” (Griffiths, *Untitled Early TDF* 2). Once Griffiths transitions this play into a two-hander the singular perspective is widened as HE speaks for himself, now present on the stage with SHE. However, a trace of the initial writing style remains in the final version of *The Darling Family* when SHE tells HE, “I found myself imagining what you’d do. Making up a whole thing in my head about you, thinking for you” (Griffiths, “Darling” 151). Here, Griffiths as playwright subtly speaks through SHE, referencing her process of grappling with how to tell this story. It is her story. Yet from the outset she fictionalizes and expands her lived experience. While considering the partner’s perspective, SHE insists, “I’m trying not to speak for you. I want to, but I’m trying not to. Maybe I should speak for you” and ultimately refuses, “But I won’t. Okay? I won’t” (Griffiths, “Darling” 151). Of course, Linda Griffiths remains the solo writer of the script, but in performance seeing and hearing SHE and HE express their inner thoughts provides the audience with diverse perspectives on this journey through an unplanned pregnancy.

As Griffiths transitions the play from her own experience to writing the journey of two unnamed, undescribed characters, the audience no longer witnesses a confessional monologue. Importantly, Griffiths employs *thoughtspeak* for the first time in the 1988 workshop draft of *The Darling Family*. In fact, a note that proceeds this scene, “**Duet**” or, in subsequent drafts “Duet for three,” connects this instance of overlapped *thoughtspeak* with the subtitle of the play (Griffiths, *TDF Workshop Draft Feb 1988* 9; Griffiths, *TDF May 1988 Draft* 9). In the 1988 draft, the *thoughtspeak* that SHE and HE speak has points of similarity with divergent meanings. For example, they both call the pregnancy “*some*

kind of shaky miracle” and each admits to previous feelings of invincibility, recalling thoughts that “*it would never happen to me*” (Griffiths, *TDF Workshop Draft Feb 1988 9*). Although SHE and HE speak these same lines and express a sense of feeling “*sick*,” they also reach a different visceral verdict (Griffiths, *TDF Workshop Draft Feb 1988 9*). SHE wonders, “*It could be done . . . it’s possible, but is it possible with him?*” while HE thinks “*There’s no way, I just feel sick inside*” (Griffiths, *TDF Workshop Draft Feb 1988 9*). Yet, SHE concludes “*It doesn’t matter*” and maintains “*it is possible*” (Griffiths, *TDF Workshop Draft Feb 1988 9*). As Griffiths transitions *The Darling Family* from a personal piece to one that barely leaves traces of its autobiographical inspiration, she also early-on uses *thoughtspeak* to make bare the thoughts and feelings of both HE and SHE.

In the final version, Griffiths builds even more texture into the layers of physical presence on the stage within these duets. SHE and HE consider the metaphysical presence of a third in this verbal dance for two or, three. In this crucial moment, Griffiths keeps HE and SHE physically distant and their conversation silent while they speak their thoughts. SHE and HE simultaneously think “*I thought it would never happen to me*” (Griffiths, *Darling 18*). Their thoughts follow the same path as they remember a moment when he took her hand as they crossed the street together. SHE recalls his caring grasp, feeling “*like there were three of us crossing the street*” but then factually “*that there were three of us crossing the street*” (Griffiths, *Darling 19*). The reiteration of the image of three paired with the use of “*like*” and subsequent repetition with slight difference, “*that*,” demonstrates SHE’s understanding of the fetus as a tangible third presence. Meanwhile,

HE remains steadfast that he can “[n]ever take her hand like that again” and maintains “*There aren’t three of us crossing the street*” (Griffiths, *Darling* 19). In these three understandings of the same action there are three paths their journey, and ideology surrounding pregnancy, can take. HE denies the fetus as a third being, SHE considers the possibility of life with “*like*” and confirms the presence of a third with “*that*.” By putting these three endings into delicate word choices which are performed as the characters’ thoughts demonstrates how *thoughtspeak* allows Griffiths to subtly speak to the audience through both writing and performance.

Indeed, the audience experiences the fragments of the conversation between SHE and HE but must piece together the journey for themselves. Kym Bird considers such instances of “[t]he shared language of inner dialogue” as “suggest[ing] that the characters verbalize or ‘name’ their thoughts, and thus construct and imagine their dilemma, in a similar way” (41). This may be the case in the early moments of the play, but as their journey nears its end their conversation no longer overlaps in duets. Griffiths writes a distinct final fragment of *thoughtspeak* for each character. The night before the procedure HE allows himself to think about the alternative, if they were to miss the appointment. However, HE conjures a person who is “*someone like me but isn’t me*” (Griffiths, *Darling* 59). HE imagines this other person “*saying, ‘No, stop, we’ll have it, we’ll work it out. It’s all right’*” (59). HE slips into this moment with the use of first-person, envisioning “*I hold my ear to her stomach the way everyone is doing, the way everyone is doing out there in the world, we do it too*” until HE catches himself, “*But it’s not me*”

(59). As quickly as HE falls into the moment HE confirms it is not their future. Finally, he resolves once again, "*I can be strong tomorrow. That's all . . . let it be over. Whatever it is she believes in, let it protect us both*" (59). Although HE has previously refused SHE's spirituality, this final line stands as a concession to her ways of thinking about the pregnancy.

His resolution is followed by an analogous final moment of *thoughtspeak* in which SHE recites a poem. Griffiths reintegrates an edited version of "Before an Abortion" as SHE's thoughts the night before the procedure. It receives no title or markers in the published text that explain this poem's significance to Griffiths personally. SHE imagines communicating with the third presence in the duet, "*Speak softly,/to the little one,/sea anemone,/don't be afraid to picture it,/think of it,/eight weeks' worth*" (59). A twenty-nine-line free verse poem begins with this acknowledgement of the eight weeks of life and growth that has occurred in her body. However, it transitions into SHE's decision, "*Say,/I ask you to leave*" (60). The line break before her appeal to the third in the duet indicates a pause, potentially for the conversation and the deliberations that we have just witnessed. The journey of this play. This sentence finishes with the longest line of the poem, "*flow out of me like rain like water like mucus like blood*" (60). SHE has asked the third presence in the play to depart and depicts the physical reality of the procedure. The subsequent line, a single sentence, acknowledges the entity's equivalently fleeting existence, "*This is such a short time for you.*" And SHE asks "*Become a memory for me*" (60). While HE imagines an alternate reality, SHE grounds into the present

moment and considers the procedure her body will soon undergo while speaking to the “*sea anemone*” a final time (59).

This poem also deals directly with how SHE conceives of her transformation through this journey. SHE vocalizes feelings of “*never be[ing] totally good again, I will know the dark/eye of the Mother, carrying the balance of so much*” and her journey ends the play as she emphasizes the permanent impact of this experience, “*but always so, always so, always so*” (60). Finally, she relies on anaphoric metaphors to compare herself to volatile weather patterns, “*I am an earthquake, I am a tidal wave*” to “*I am the twisting volcano*” (60). The poem, however, ends with a return to the child as she says “*I give you up, I give you up*” and prays, “*Creator take you, sky enfold you, stars remember you*” before reworking a well-known literary representation of death, “*Go gentle into that good night*” (60).¹⁰³ Just as these two separate moments of *thoughtspeak* initiate, HE’s and SHE’s distinct experience of the procedure follows. While HE worries about preparing for her return, SHE narrates the procedure. Although she “*fight[s] it [the anesthetic] for a bit*” the ending is ultimately “*so inevitable*” (62). *Thoughtspeak* creates an intimacy in the text that is not reliant upon an overtly confessional autobiographical narrative. Griffiths achieves intimacy with her presence in the play as both actor and playwright as well as by nurturing a connection between the audience and the characters with *thoughtspeak*.

¹⁰³ This poem is a private and intimate interaction as a pregnant woman speaks directly to her child from the first-person, a fact that differs from Bird’s observation that the child is “*always referred to as his child*” (Bird 43).

Paradoxically, these incredibly personal final moments of her journey contrast with the play's opening monologue in which SHE recounts a young girl's traumatic incestual rape, subsequent societal ostracization, and birth of a stillborn baby. This sequence is not initially the audience's introduction to the narrative. A note from the 1988 workshop reads "**IDEA Past life speech first**" (*Notes and Fragments* 8). Having been relocated to the opening of the play, this narrative serves as a seemingly unrelated but thematically connected introduction to SHE and HE's situation. Scott argues it participates in the core "political statement [which] lies in claiming abortion as a 'natural' act" ("Bodies, Form and Nature" 203). Or, as Bird posits, "The opening, stream-of-consciousness monologue connects this primary struggle [over the implications of having an abortion] with a recollection of incestuous sexual abuse which is so powerful that it has women in the audience squirming in their seats" (Bird 40). Certainly, it is clear that the girl's story lays a foundation for the narrative and, as Wilson argues, "affects SHE's response to her current pregnancy" (55). Interestingly though, during an interview published soon after the premiere, while Griffiths emphasizes the centrality of the opening sequence to the play she also tells Rachel Rafelman it was this scene "that the entire play developed out of, not the (abortion) matter" (C5). Archival traces prove that Griffiths bends the truth with this statement by covering her own lived experience. Her emphasis upon this opening narrative and her insistence upon its divergent meaning from the philosophical deliberations on abortion is telling but also amiss. SHE's pregnancy is a middle-class, accidental pregnancy, with legal options available to the couple. Pairing it

with the unprotected young girl, the savage incestuous assault, begins the play with a horrific image.

The audience is given a glimpse into this girl's life of despair. She describes her surroundings first, "It's hot. . . . There's a white crumbling room with bodies sleeping in dirty clothes. The place is crowded, and it stinks" (Griffiths, *Darling* 11). This is a twelve-year-old girl who lives in a ghetto and whose mother merely laughs and proclaims "Now you're in for it" upon her daughter's first signs of fertility (Griffiths, *Darling* 11). The girl's father has previously shown her favour by bringing her food, suggesting nourishment is in short supply. Now, he comes to her room at night. She describes her father grotesquely as he heinously assaults her and betrays the protection parents should provide. The girl's only thoughts are "I wipe the slob from my cunt and I get out of there. Maybe I kill him, I don't know. I can't remember" (Griffiths, *Darling* 12). Her psyche breaks, disassociating after the assault. The audience is given a glimpse into her incredibly difficult life, one where she lives without protection and lacks safe living circumstances. Her pregnancy proceeds similarly, the girl remains uncared for since her belly grows while "the rest of [her] gets really skinny" (Griffiths, *Darling* 12). The pregnancy is the focus of this sequence, but the girl's circumstances begin with her parents.

In their deliberations SHE and HE wonder if they are ready to become parents. HE asks her to imagine a future "when [she's] post-natally depressed and exhausted . . . and [she] can't work at home and there's no one to help..." at which point SHE

completes the scenario “And I haven’t slept in days and I’m sitting on the floor crying with the baby in my arms crying” which continues without punctuation until “and I’m banging my head against the wall then I take the kid to do the same thing...” (Griffiths, *Darling* 48). HE confirms the connection to the opening sequence when he tells her “Stop it. There’s nothing down there but dirt and hate and craziness” by using similar vocabulary to the girl’s description of her life after the birth, “Then all I know is craziness. Dirt and hate and craziness” (Griffiths, *Darling* 48, 14). The connection between SHE and the girl is not only the pregnancy. This vision of parenthood and childhood suffering haunts SHE as the fact of her pregnancy links with a necessary capacity for nurturing another being. Even if SHE were to have the baby, in her privileged circumstances, she may not be able to provide adequate care for the child. These considerations move beyond the issue of the fetus, to the reality for the adults, the potential parents. Griffiths wrote “A LIFE FOR A LIFE” on the cover of the January 1990 draft of *The Darling Family* (Griffiths, *TDF Workshop Draft Jan 1990* 1). Paired with looking through her mother’s eye in the poem, these points discuss the impact an unprepared or unwilling parent has on a child. “Are we grown up now?” SHE asks HE, the last line of the play (Griffiths, *Darling* 62). Each fragment touches on the journey of SHE and HE as they consider the presence of a third while also touching upon this broader question of an individual’s readiness to embark upon the life-long journey of parenthood.

However, the girl's traumatic ending contrasts with SHE's discovery that either decision, while difficult, would not result in such tragedy. The young girl crawls, ill and in labour, to nuns after having been told "They've got some kind of place up the hill for people to die in" (Griffiths, *Darling* 12). The girl's labour is long, intense, fragmented, and painful. Finally, she struggles to ask "'show me the baby'" but states, "I know it's dead. I don't know if I hear it, but I hear 'strangled'. It's my fault. I wanted it to be dead and now it's dead" (Griffiths, *Darling* 13–14). How she lives the rest of her life is summed up in one final line, "Cursing them till it's over" (Griffiths, *Darling* 14). This narrative depicts intergenerational trauma. Perhaps Griffiths's inclusion of such a story as SHE's past-life represents the ripping of freedom and safety from a young girl's life due to lack of agency over her body, and also the parents' failure to protect her.

SHE's decision does not have such stark possibilities. One fragment, six lines of dialogue, sums up her thoughts on the purpose of this journey. SHE and HE participate in "throw[ing] the I Ching" and receive the image "'Heaven above, heaven below'" (Griffiths, *Darling* 35, 36). When HE looks to SHE for guidance the audience learns in *thoughtspeak* "It means either way heaven. Either way. But I can't tell him that" before she lies, "I don't know" (Griffiths, *Darling* 36). Later, SHE prays to an undefined deity "Is it your gift for me to know this death? Or is this moment your gift? Heaven above, heaven below. Accept the gift. That's all I know" (Griffiths, *Darling* 52). For SHE although the choice to end the pregnancy seems "inevitable" the past-life vision, one possibility, is contrasted by a different dream. SHE recounts, "Last night I dreamt of a

little boy, toddler sized, all bundled up in a red snow suit. I only saw his back, he was just walking away. I think I made that appointment a long, long time ago” (Griffiths, *Darling* 57). While an abortion would have saved the girl from a miserable life, for SHE the decision is not as critical but she does paint the darkest picture in her mind. Ultimately, she asks the idea of a healthy, cared-for child to leave, although she will carry her mother’s perspective with her. In this poem SHE arrives at the truth that she is not ready to become a parent. *The Darling Family* is about having the introspective conversation, about an everywoman character going on this journey and ultimately doing what she thinks is best for her life, even when heaven may be found in either direction.

The beauty, the strength, the meaning of Griffiths’s work lies in the intricacy of how she weaves together this multitude of foci. Her initial exploration of using her own experiences to create a play connects with her education in collective creation. Rather than maintaining this relationship to truth, Griffiths transforms her autobiography into SHE and HE’s fictional story. *Thoughtspeak* as a device connects with this relationship since it builds intimacy and trust between the audience and the characters. As Wilson posits, “For *The Darling Family* to be a successful theatrical experience, the audience must believe in the conversations between the two characters as the expression of their private thoughts. . . . The audience must be caught up in the exchange between the two characters and believe that what each is saying is true, even if only in the moment” (Wilson 61–62). Ultimately, the question of “Who is the ‘we’ of this couple?” as Ann

Wilson asks, and as Daniel MacIvor similarly touches on by musing on the possibilities, ultimately no longer matters (Wilson 63).

The Darling Family provides an opportunity to observe what happens not only to a script as Griffiths works on it first as playwright, then actor, but also how the formal qualities of the performance evolve when she becomes increasingly present. In “Process?” Griffiths mentions the choice not to work with a director alongside a description of their performance as one “that relied heavily on feeling the link to the audience” (Griffiths, “Process?” 60). Griffiths, in writing the text and embodying SHE, indeed relies upon performing for an audience, a relationship she accentuates with her next play. At the same time, while *The Darling Family* provides the actors with an unusually liberated style with which to find their own rhythms, the script is also a beautiful, insightful, and nuanced piece of writing. For example, this connection between the actor and audience is also written into the script when HE says “Just goes to show this household doesn’t avoid those issues” (Griffiths, *Darling* 16). This moment affords an opportunity for the actor to refer or gesture to the space in which he performs in any way he chooses. Without a set, this space is the theatre itself. Griffiths transforms her own incredibly personal experiences into a play that can reach out from the text and its performance to her audience, while also bringing a complex debate to the fore.

2.2 *A Game of Inches*: Solo Performance, Improvisation, Baseball Fever

Just a month and a half after the reconstructive previews of *The Darling Family: A Duet for Three* at Prairie Theatre Exchange, Griffiths performs a new play in Nightwood Theatre's Groundswell Festival. Having written *The Darling Family* within her covalent identity as actor and playwright, Griffiths immerses herself in a process that involves collaborating on an improvised solo performance. *A Game of Inches* receives a plot description by way of a question: "Why does a woman get into baseball?" (Nightwood Theatre, *Groundswell 1990 Week One Performance Synopses*). Developing this question into a play, Linda Griffiths returns to an improvisational "on-your-feet" creative process, working with director Sandra Balcovske.

In "Process?" Griffiths's headings to *The Darling Family* and *A Game of Inches* indicate how she perceives the creation of these two texts to be different, but they also give further insight into her exploration of process during this period. Griffiths articulates that the creation of *The Darling Family* is "divided into writing and rehearsal" (Griffiths, "Process?" 60). Although these two aspects inform one another, they are separate although she continually oscillates between the two processes. On the other hand, with *A Game of Inches* Griffiths "[b]ring[s] the writing and rehearsal process back together again" (Griffiths, "Process?" 60). The creative method of stepping into the work as an actor, but back out again to write and edit, is different from the process for *A Game of*

Inches, which entails improvisation and performing for audiences before writing the script.

Once again, thanks to Griffiths's dedication to writing about her discoveries, her article remains the most thorough account of how she develops *A Game of Inches*. Traces are also scattered in the archives at the University of Guelph. Variations of the script are located throughout three boxes in the Linda Griffiths *fonds*.¹⁰⁴ These files are surrounded by other work, principally *The Darling Family* and *Spiral Woman and the Dirty Theatre*. A few details about the improvisation sessions are contained in the Performances Files of the Nightwood Theatre *fonds* and details of the production are found in the Theatre Passe Muraille Archives. By piecing together these various archival materials, a chronology, albeit incomplete, can be constructed as well as a vision of the conditions of the play's premiere.

Griffiths's first improvisational performance of *A Game of Inches* occurs as part of the sixth annual Groundswell Festival, themed "Blood + Power" (Nightwood Theatre, *The Sixth Annual Groundswell Festival Leaflet*). It is one of four works-in-progress featured on Friday, November 6th, 1990 (Nightwood Theatre, *Groundswell 1990 Performance Schedule*). A document titled "Groundswell Play Development Report" details that together Griffiths as improviser and Balcovske as director "develo[p] this piece through improvisation" and that they resolve "not to script anything throughout the

¹⁰⁴ These are boxes 51 and 52 as well as 63, each is found in the Linda Griffiths *fonds*. To reiterate, these boxes are not filled with *A Game of Inches* drafts, but contain these documents surrounded by Griffiths's other work.

development period and into performance” (Nightwood Theatre, *Groundswell [1990] Play Development Report*). Instead, Griffiths’s improvisations are taped and later reviewed for the purpose of note taking and making changes “during the following session” (Nightwood Theatre, *Groundswell [1990] Play Development Report*).

Interestingly, this report on *A Game of Inches* concludes with the statement, “Linda developed a remarkable character and a moving and humourous story. Development continues” (Nightwood Theatre, *Groundswell [1990] Play Development Report*).

Taking Griffiths’s account together with the information from Nightwood Theatre’s records, it becomes clear that *A Game of Inches* is created first with a strictly improvisational process, relying very little on the written word. Griffiths constructs this play through her body, through her actor self, for the purpose of performing a piece in front of an audience that “had never been fully written down” (Griffiths, “Process?” 61). Her choice to collaboratively create a solo show is telling. Having stripped down the elements of theatre in *The Darling Family* to a pair of actors, one of whom is also the playwright, Griffiths now creates and goes on to perform *A Game of Inches* with only herself and her director/collaborator Sandra Balcovske. Running through the loose script only “a few times” with Balcovske, Griffiths attends Groundswell and performs this play for an audience (Griffiths, “Process?” 61).

Considering the importance of form to these texts, it is significant that for the first time since *Maggie & Pierre* Griffiths returns to the stage solo. Griffiths creates and embodies Pamela, a 45-year old repressed and isolated virgin. Her long monologue that

comprises *A Game of Inches* begins, “As I lay there alone in my bed, I realized I’d had my very first baseball nightmare. And I thought, surely now he’ll call” (Griffiths, “Inches” 183). The audience learns that three years ago Pamela had a houseguest, John, who introduced her to baseball. Upon his departure she has been left alone in her house once again, waiting for his call. Reflecting on her state of stagnant expectation Pamela discusses with the audience the events of the past three years. We learn that what began as a desire to develop an interest in her houseguest’s pastime has developed into a true passion and fandom for the Toronto Blue Jays. Interspersed with “*looks towards the phone,*” Pamela thematically intertwines baseball, womanhood, sex, and performance anxiety (Griffiths, “Inches” 183).

This play receives a short run at Theatre Passe Muraille, does not tour, and only appears in *Sheer Nerve*. *A Game of Inches* is one of Griffiths’s more inconspicuous pieces, but it holds an important place in her evolution as an actor-playwright. Returning to solo performance allows Griffiths to cultivate a continued exploration of her connection with the audience. Second, the reliance upon creating through improvisation for a director and later the audience enhances this relationship. Finally, choosing to tell Pamela’s story within these intimate conditions yet also connecting her search for agency with baseball allows this character to consider gender essentialism and power dynamics between men and women. Overall, these elements relating to both the creation and performance of *A Game of Inches* impact Pamela’s recognition of her own agency and, in turn, affect how the audience may perceive her revelation.

Solo performance inherently enhances the relationship between the spectators and performers by leaving little else in the theatre for distraction. As Jenn Stephenson explains, “the preoccupations of solo performance are with other people, with the basic connections of theatre—the playwright and the performer, the actor and character, the character and the audience, the individual and her community. Ultimately, the performer of monodrama may be solo, but she is certainly not alone” (Stephenson, “Introduction: Solo Performance” xiii). Often in this form the playwright embodies the character, further narrowing these basic connections to the playwright-actor-character and the audience. Griffiths does just that. Within this performance Pamela emerges as a repressed and unnaturally subdued character. She begins completely unaware she has the ability to call John rather than having to wait for his action. Indeed, she finds the agency to call John, but also to tell her story. Sherrill Grace powerfully considers the proliferation of monodramas written by women in her introduction to *A Voice of Her Own*, that “women playwrights have found their voices and dare to tell their stories; they are insisting that their stories matter as much as Krapp’s or Billy’s, that female experiences, insights, knowledge, and perspectives are valuable” (Grace, “Voicing Women’s Experience” iv).¹⁰⁵ Standing before the audience insisting she tell her story, Pamela discovers that

¹⁰⁵ Grace alludes here to her previously mentioned and now defunct tendency to think of Eugene O’Neill, Samuel Beckett (*Krapp’s Last Tape*), and John Gray (*Billy Bishop Goes to War*, written with Eric Peterson) when she “thought about monologue plays, or plays with long monologues” (Grace, “Voicing Women’s Experience” iii). It was *The Occupation of Heather Rose* by Wendy Lill (1989) that effectuated a shift in her attention to long monologues written specifically by women (Grace, “Voicing Women’s Experience” iii).

sharing her story is the first step towards finding the courage to make the call, to take the leap of faith, and move away from living a lie. This play's overarching narrative is about relationship, reaching out from lonely isolation, and making connections.

The opening stage directions of *A Game of Inches* establish the subjugation under which Pamela has been living. Comprehensive details are provided about this character and the performance space,

an upright woman of forty-five or more, wearing a Toronto Blue Jays cap, is sitting on a chair beside a huge pile of baseball books and a telephone. The cap looks both incongruous and correct. It should appear that she is sitting in a large, impoverished, ancestral home. PAMELA seems to be from another time. (Griffiths, "Inches" 183)

Her appearance and her living space each suggest that she exists in a realm not defined on her own terms. The space she speaks from is ancestral but also impoverished, therefore a home that she has inherited but finds herself unable or unwilling to maintain.

Additionally, the numerous books on baseball could represent a passionate interest in the subject. Yet, since she looks "*incongruous and correct*" surrounded by these props and wearing the hat her interest in the sport furthers Pamela's incongruity with her own identity, home, and even time. These elements introduce themes which Pamela develops in her monologue. She comments on the heroic journey of famous baseball players that juxtapose her role as mere spectator of her own life. Of course, this is about to change as the audience enters her space.

The inciting moment of the play occurs at the end of these stages directions, “*She speaks to the audience as if they are a group of people that have paid fifty cents to be toured through the house, and have asked a leading question, like, ‘How are you?’*” (Griffiths, “Inches” 183).¹⁰⁶ The theatrical moment becomes focused on what solo performance leaves in the theatre; the performer, the audience, the script becoming the central elements. Just so, Jenn Stephenson argues this form “questions what the audience is doing: Why do we listen?” (Stephenson, “Introduction: Solo Performance” ix). She provides a possible answer: “that the desire for connection runs both ways” and confirms with Sherrill Grace’s observation that “[t]hey [the solo characters] provide us secrets, truths, and authenticity missing in so much of the impersonal, packaged world we inhabit. They also share, and exploit, a crucial sense of connections with the reader (or audience member) because each one is performed for, addressed to us” (Stephenson, “Introduction: Solo Performance” ix). Griffiths’s choice to have Pamela answering a question from the audience enhances this aspect of solo performance. In a way, it intensifies this connection by blatantly answering the reciprocal question, “Why does the character speak?” The audience’s ticket purchase enables attendance of the performance as well as a tour of Pamela’s home. Further, they initiate the monologue by asking her how she is doing. She speaks because of the audience’s presence as well as their interest. Griffiths as Pamela, as improvising creator, and as solo actor in each performance looks

¹⁰⁶ In fact, beginning the play by directly addressing the audience becomes her signature in the next phase of her career with *The Duchess* and *Alien Creature*.

at the audience and answers their “*leading question*,” acknowledging the audience and addressing them directly.

In her analysis of women’s monodrama in Canada Patricia Badir uses Jill Dolan’s seminal work in *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* to establish that “[a]s the locus of semiotic interpretation, the woman on stage is always already determined and the ‘I’ she defiantly speaks, thrown into question” (122). However, like the monodramas Badir analyzes, Griffiths’s creation of Pamela’s space and her relationship with the audience is aware of the “conditions of spectatorship and representation [against which] . . . she must contend” (122). She foundationally scripts the audience’s attention as well as insisting upon involvement. The ideal spectator has paid for a tour of Pamela’s home, has inquired about her state of being, and now listens as a part of the fictional world on stage.

From the very beginning of the play Griffiths develops a parallel between baseball, sex, and art. Pamela addresses her stalled position in life: “I’m aware that it’s ridiculous, being a virgin at my age” (Griffiths, “Inches” 183). She expresses feelings of having waited too long, that she should have “gone out and done it a long time ago,” yet questions “why everything has to be done at once” (Griffiths, “Inches” 184).

Transitioning into a consideration of artistic creation Pamela points out that “[p]ainters don’t paint masterpieces all at once” (Griffiths, “Inches” 184). Meaningfully, she lists training exercises with which painters might practise before referring to “‘Blue Boy’ and ‘Pinkie’” as examples of mastery (Griffiths, “Inches” 184). Although these two pieces are by different painters the representation of, respectively, a young boy in blue garb and a

young girl in a light pink dress, has become linked in popular perception. As a result, these pieces are hung together where they are housed at the Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens (“Pinkie”; “The Blue Boy”). Pamela’s journey about learning to initiate an interaction with John becomes aligned with these classic representations of gender in art.

Returning to her story Pamela recalls an early memory of attending a dance as a young woman which leads to an exploration and critique of gender essentialism. She describes a well-known scene, entering the dance and seeing “the girls, batting their eyelashes and giggling and listening to the boys talk about sports, pretending interest—you know, the way women do” (Griffiths, “Inches” 184). At this age Pamela refuses to engage in acting a certain way for the attention of the opposite sex, choosing instead to sit on a couch at the sidelines. Returning to the present moment, Pamela now observes “This is all that’s left,” revealing she has kept “an entire floor” of her house empty, waiting for “*him* when *he* came” (Griffiths, “Inches” 184). Despite her early refusal to feign interest in sports for the attention of boys, she has since fashioned her living space around the expectation that a man would eventually enter and fill the emptiness. She does not feel comfortable taking up space in her own home, her own life. When John arrives, he does comfortably occupy the space, however, he acts in a way that denies her desperation for connection and a sexual relationship. She benevolently invites him to live with her, generously suggesting a rent of “two hundred and fifty dollars or ... nothing” (Griffiths, “Inches” 184). He responds to her altruism curtly, ““Sure”” which Pamela characterizes

as “The way they do. ‘Sure’” (Griffiths, “Inches” 184). She will return to develop this refrain, but Pamela first says that while “waiting for him to come” she wishes she “had known then about Sadaharu Oh . . . perhaps the most successful hitter ever” (Griffiths, “Inches” 184). Through this elongated metaphor, Pamela’s private life becomes so public she makes the process of empowerment as popular as baseball players recovering from not being able to hit a ball.

Indeed, Pamela pairs each step towards her revelation with a story about a baseball player’s experience of performance anxiety. First, she teaches the audience that Oh was “perhaps the most successful hitter ever” (Griffiths, “Inches” 184). Oh’s early inability to hit a home run, or any pitch for that matter, metaphorically comes to represent Pamela’s own repression, sexual and otherwise. He learns to concentrate on what his teacher calls *ki*, the “point of spirit energy in the body” and on eliminating the *mah*, the “energy between opponents,” in this case he must “learn never to think of the pitcher as his enemy” (Griffiths, “Inches” 185). Sadaharu Oh does these things and adopts a unique stance of batting on one leg. He finally “hits the ball with a resounding crack” (Griffiths, “Inches” 185). Pamela reenacts the moment when Oh chooses to play his natural game by “*stand[ing] on one leg*” and as he runs to each base, completing his home run, the “crowd chants, ‘Oh! Oh! Oh!’” until “[*t*]he chant becomes rather orgasmic in nature” (Griffiths, “Inches” 185). Griffiths uses the true comeback of a baseball player to move Pamela towards liberation.

Establishing the analogy, Pamela returns the story to her kitchen where John finally arrives. However, not having learnt these lessons yet as she waves him in she becomes upset at the sight of a man in her space and “all of a sudden...all [she] can see is...the enemy!” (Griffiths, “Inches” 185). Oh’s ultimately successful career is contrasted with Pamela’s vision of her next “forty-five years in one fell swoop,” she sees a future where she is “changing his colostomy bag” and she knows “all I’ll want to do is serve and serve and serve” (Griffiths, “Inches” 185). Nonetheless, she invites John and when he asks to watch the game she says ““Sure,”” repeating the refrain ““The way I do now, ‘Sure.’”” (Griffiths, “Inches” 186). Initially, she cannot even focus on the games they watch together. Eventually, the Blue Jays win which provides the opportunity for Pamela and John to celebrate and connect. Despite their time together, their shared interests, this excitement, and her hopes that “something more could happen with the evening” she remains silent, “of course I don’t speak” (Griffiths, “Inches” 188). He goes into the third floor space he has now filled with his presence and dirty clothing while Pamela returns to her bed alone where she “ache[s] the way women ache when they want something they can’t ask for” (Griffiths, “Inches” 188).

By equating Pamela’s repression with the performance anxiety of baseball players Griffiths creates a play that performs the feminist aim of making the personal political. In this sense, *A Game of Inches* aligns with “the private and intimate nature of the monodrama” while Pamela’s monologue “becomes comparable to the solitary yet political acts of journal writing and diary keeping which are forms of personal expression

seeking to explore female experiences left out of history, literature and art” (Badir 121). While Griffiths’s performance transforms her into the players who succeed at hitting the ball she also remains Pamela, a small woman without the same liberation.

There are two elements related to the performance of this show and Griffiths’s creative process that further impact Pamela’s story. By way of concluding her consideration of *A Game of Inches* in “Process?” Griffiths curiously leaves an intuitive note undeveloped, “it was a good year for baseball, and the audience helped to form the piece, which is another part of these processes I haven’t even gotten to: how the audience informs certain kinds of work, especially when it’s still being written and you can adjust on the spot” (Griffiths, “Process?” 61). Griffiths does not explain or expand upon the implications about her improvisational process, this will come in future work. However, this comment does hint at the connection between the baseball trope and her audience’s reception of the piece.

Surprisingly, the play receives mention in the *STAR Sports* section in a piece by Alison Gordon. Entitled “Everything Is Possible on Opening Day of the Baseball Season,” this full-page article features a photo of Linda Griffiths as Pamela in its centre. Sporting an oversized nightgown with horizontal strips and a collar, Griffiths holds a clenched fist in the air and has a determined, scrunched expression of competition. After considering the upcoming season, Gordon discusses “a wonderful stage play called *A Game of Inches*, now running on weekends at Theatre Passe Muraille as a fundraiser” (Gordon 62). She lauds Griffiths as “extraordinarily talented” for writing and performing

solo in “the one-act play” that “is a brilliant examination of baseball, sex, and other sweet mysteries of life” (Gordon 62). Gordon describes Griffiths’s compelling impersonations of George Bell and Tony Fernandez, “no mean feat considering that she is a small, white, woman,” thrilled with the accurate and hilarious comedy of the play (Gordon 62).

Gordon’s conclusion touches on the political undercurrents of *A Game of Inches* as she observes her own perspective, “It’s probably heresy for a television columnist to urge people to turn off their sets, but *A Game of Inches* is worth leaving home for, especially if you are the kind of fan who loves the game for more than just the stats” (Gordon 62).

Finally, Gordon concludes with an incredibly pregnant comment, “Women, in particular, will enjoy it, but so will men whose minds are the slightest bit open” (Gordon 62).

Relying upon baseball thematically in the text also provides the opportunity to expand the potential audience base.

Pamela’s journey towards finding agency being paired with the narrative of baseball legends receives emphasis in both the conditions of the theatre upon performance and how the play is advertised. Leading to its premiere, *A Game of Inches* is described in a press release from Theatre Passe Muraille as “a one-woman show written and performed by Linda Griffiths” which “received thunderous applause” at the Groundswell Festival (Theatre Passe Muraille, *Theatre Passe Muraille Presents: A Game of Inches*). The plot description focuses on Pamela who is “probably the first woman to fall in love through both the mystique of the Toronto Blue Jays and some ancient Eastern mysticism” (Theatre Passe Muraille, *Theatre Passe Muraille Presents: A Game of*

Inches). She is sketched as a recluse who “invites a down-at-the-heels-acquaintance into her home” and whose “[l]ife turns upside down when he innocently asks ‘Can I watch the game?’ . . . and the rest becomes a delicate game of inches” (Theatre Passe Muraille, *Theatre Passe Muraille Presents: A Game of Inches*). However, a flyer advertising the upcoming show appeals widely by emphasizing the play as “[f]ast and loose” as well as a “fun-filled one hour performance [that] will have Linda’s fans, baseball fanatics, spring fever sufferers and everyone else in the bleachers cheering wildly as she hits a home run in this hilarious and tender show” (Theatre Passe Muraille, *A Games of Inches Advertisement*). The atmosphere described here transforms the backspace of Theatre Passe Muraille into a baseball arena, the audience cast as fans sitting in “bleachers.” The premiere relies upon Griffiths’s name and status as a well-known solo performer to draw a crowd, but also enhances this connection with baseball fandom.

However, this spectacle is also created for a more threatening reason. In *City Stages: Theatre and Urban Space in a Global City* Michael McKinnie establishes that “[t]he 1990s [are] unkind to mid-sized, not-for-profit theatres across Canada” (McKinnie, *City Stages* 87). McKinnie specifies that both a recession and a lack of support from public arts funding or private sponsorship causes “severe financial pressure for the entire decade” to theatres of this kind, including Theatre Passe Muraille (McKinnie, *City Stages* 88). As such, *A Game of Inches* runs as a benefit for the theatre. There is no mention of this in *Sheer Nerve* or other resources on this play, but the front page of the programme reads, “A series of performances produced in aid of THEATRE PASSE MURAILLE”

(Programme). Although the script development occurs outside this theatre, the conditions of its premiere production are involved with relief efforts.

Numerous letters in the Theatre Passe Muraille collection serve to clarify the relationship between the emphasis upon baseball and the financial crisis. For example, a letter dated March 7, 1991, addressed to the Director of Marketing at Kinney Canada requests sponsorship for *A Game of Inches*, “a fundraiser to assist with our capital deficit reduction campaign” (*Letter to Mr. Carl Noylander*). It goes on to express delight in receiving support from the Toronto Blue Jays in the form of items to assist the benefit as well as helping to seek the rights to air game highlights before each performance. This letter states these elements will aid “the creation of an environment of ‘baseball fever’” along with plans to sell “hot dogs, beer, popcorn, etc.” (*Letter to Mr. Carl Noylander*). A similar letter to Ken Allen, Sports Marketing Director of Nike Canada at the time, begins “[o]ver 23 years of operation, the Theatre has accumulated a capital debt of over \$450,000” (*Letter to Mr. Ken Allen*). It likewise describes their objective of “creat[ing] a ‘baseball atmosphere’ for audiences” since the play’s plot “revolves around a woman’s point of view of baseball” while using this focus to appeal directly to the company’s recent advertising “campaign of ‘YOUR MOTHER WEARS NIKE’” to solicit sponsorship (*Letter to Mr. Ken Allen*). Together, these letters illustrate the theatre’s efforts to create this atmosphere of baseball fever for the premiere of *A Game of Inches*, but also to seek financial support.

The programme and additional archival remnants from this production document the success of their endeavour. The campaign succeeds in receiving extensive support based on the acknowledgement of corporations, theatres, establishments, and various individuals in the programme.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, the team works to create an immersive atmosphere for their audience. During a production meeting on Monday, March 11, there is discussion of decorating “box seats” with “bunting” and of hope for banners to be supplied by sponsors (*Production Meeting Notes*). There are also notes about the bar and concession selling hot dogs, chips, and beer. Another item, “Linda would like the concession workers to wear baseball caps,” suggests she participates in the creation of this baseball fever, ensuring it is present in even the smallest details (*Production Meeting Notes*). The stage manager’s comments about opening night illustrate the atmosphere, “Opened house at 7:30 for audience to eat, drink & be merry at the ‘HARD ROCK CAFE.’ Fairly good turn out and very good audience response—well received. Held the doors for an extra 5 minutes – waiting for the Press, thus going up at 8:35p.m” (Millikin). The conditions of this premiere of *A Game of Inches* are linked with relief efforts for Theatre Passe Muraille’s financial crisis and the idea to create an environment like a

¹⁰⁷ Specifically, the acknowledgements section lists, “Ricoh Canada, Nike Canada Ltd., Nightwood Theatre, Primo Foods, Second City, Cadbury Beverages Ltd., Loblaws Supermarkets Ltd., Upper Canada Breweries, Mr. & Mrs. Han, Quality Bakery, Humpty Dumpty Foods Ltd., Epicure Café, Kinko’s Copies, Jack Daniels, Toronto Blue Jays, Alan Williams, Sandra Balcovske, Linda Griffiths, VideoCabaret, Thomson Consumer Electronics Canada Ltd.-RCA, Om Taka Taka, Lorne Perlumtar, Kate Lynch and all our volunteers” (Programme).

sports arena contributes to the run generating over \$13,000 (Theatre Passe Muraille, *Inches Box Office Report*).

This campaign also builds an atmosphere of baseball fandom that enhances the relationship between Pamela and the audience that Griffiths creates on multiple levels of script, form, and performance. Of course, theatre relies upon the financial reality of the audience purchasing tickets, fundraising, and other forms of support. In this case it also affects the meaning of *A Game of Inches* in performance for the theatre atmosphere to be altered in this way. Pamela's final realization in the play occurs in a moment of speaking directly to those who asked how she is doing.

The refrain about acting in socially appropriate ways according to one's gender together with Pamela's stories about baseball players leads to an epiphany, "it can't all be to do with winning and losing, it must be how you play the game" (Griffiths, "Inches" 192). "Take it from me," she instructs, "no one ever won by thinking about winning all the time, you can't play your natural game then" (Griffiths, "A Game of Inches" 192–93). This point reoccurs as she continues,

You can't push to win, pray to win, think to win, play to win, you can only be ready to win. Prepared. Tell them it's about waiting for the perfect moment, balancing your spirit energy, eliminating the *mah*, playing your natural game, and having the courage to...

(PAMELA stops dead, as if hit with a great revelation . . .)

and the play comes to its end with Pamela calling John, but only after “*raising herself on one leg*” (Griffiths, “Inches” 193). While recounting private memories and teaching the audience about the career of various baseball players, Pamela discovers her own agency. Of course, the phone has been on the stage the entire time, Pamela merely needs to realize she can initiate contact.

A Game of Inches interweaves this feminist story about agency and working against repression with the true stories of professional baseball players. The theatre’s atmosphere of baseball fever juxtaposes Pamela’s tense demeanor and her incongruent yet correct home. As solo performer and playwright Griffiths once again intricately creates the theatrical experience with her audience in mind and, in this case, brings them into the performance. Yet, Badir argues that the playwrights in her study “have all chosen the monodrama as a vehicle for the expression of a woman’s voice, precisely because it aptly inscribes the ‘I’ while recognising that the very act is always already beyond her control” (122–23). The emphasis upon a repressed woman needing to learn to act as herself rather than yielding to presumptions placed upon her is a subtextual didactic meaning to Pamela’s development, one that audience members must realize, and be willing to realize, on their own.

At its ideological core, this play makes public the story of a woman who, upon sight of a man entering her space, exclaims “This is me! This is my mind, I fought for it! This is me, you can’t come here!” (Griffiths, “Inches” 186). As Gordon playfully implies, watching baseball on a television at home is a safer endeavour than attending this live

theatre event that is about more than the recreational indulgence of watching a team sport. These conditions of the premiere demonstrate Griffiths's dedication to the community of Theatre Passe Muraille and her imaginative methods of audience engagement. The strength of *A Game of Inches* as both a textual and performative product exemplifies what Griffiths can create through her body. The enlightening subtext and underlying meaning of this play, as with *O.D. on Paradise*, shines through the entertaining plot and innovative performance.

During the process of creating *A Game of Inches* Griffiths discovers a way to integrate her actor-playwright identity within the solo form as well as to rely upon her own talent as an improvisational creator. Griffiths's visceral gift exists within these multifaceted elements of her theatre. However, it is also crucial that she creates this play by connecting with the audience at every stage of the development and performance. Indeed, this play foregrounds the spectator-performer relationship that exemplifies Griffiths's deliberate development of this aspect of her own creative voice. Paul Thompson recalls working with Griffiths on *If You Are So Good, Why Are You in Saskatoon?* in his piece "The Road to Becoming a Writer." "[P]erhaps the most enduring gift the show brought was the spirit of engagement with a popular audience. This hunger for complicity with the public haunted all the future plays I made with Linda" (P. Thompson 16). In the same collection, *Linda Griffiths* (2018), Layne Coleman interestingly takes a slightly different perspective on Griffiths's awareness of her audience: "I have never met any artist of the theatre who peaked through the curtain

before the show like you did, and if there were any empty chairs, it made you furious, like some great opportunity had been lost” (“Stage Time” 143). Griffiths herself tells Kathleen Gallagher “I think that doing that initial work that I did with improvised theatre gave me the respect and love of the audience. So I’m an addict for full houses” (Griffiths and Gallagher 125). This sensibility underlies Griffiths’s creation of both *The Darling Family* and *A Game of Inches*. Precisely how this cognizance of writing and performing for an audience affects Griffiths’s work cannot be concretely determined. As Griffiths explores variations on form, subject, and even the role she plays in the creation of her art, she also seems to expand and reconsider her relationship with the audience. In the case of *A Game of Inches* Pamela’s discovery of self develops alongside Griffiths’s own consideration of her artistry. The play with form and creative process continues into the next period of her career. Meanwhile, Pamela has taught the audience the importance of “playing your natural game and having the courage to. . .” (Griffiths, “Inches” 193).

2.3 *Spiral Woman and the Dirty Theatre: Voicing Change*

Spiral Woman and the Dirty Theatre premieres at the Backspace of Theatre Passe Muraille in May 1993. In Griffiths’s second solo show during this period of her career, she plays Trish the titular Spiral Woman who is named for the way she moves, “*as if trying to unwind her body from within*” (Griffiths, *Spiral* 4). Trish is “an ‘underground’ actress and member of the Dirty Theatre clan [who] is bedridden with a Mysterious

Illness” (Griffiths, *Spiral* 3). She believes the illness pertains to “the winter of the Snow Spell, when the Dirty Theatre was fighting for its life” (Griffiths, *Spiral* 3). From her bedroom Trish tells the story of this winter when the “Clan [of the Dirty Theatre] was mounting its production of *The Paradise Play*” (Griffiths, *Spiral* 3). Griffiths, as Trish, fictionally recounts the truculent and uncertain time surrounding the 1984 remount of *O.D. on Paradise*.

Pseudonyms are given to characters and moments in Theatre Passe Muraille’s history, here the “Dirty Theatre” as it mounts “*The Paradise Play*.” Trish describes the preparation of the set, working on its script, the premiere, and the scandal that follows which has been caused by the Spider Woman Critic.¹⁰⁸ However, Trish hopes that reliving these events will release her from the bed on which she is imprisoned. Despite these pseudonyms being thinly veiled and a connection to the real events easily made since the action remains in the realm of truth, the programme maintains “The Dirty Theatre is not, nor has ever been a real place. . . . The characters too, may seem real, but nothing is real seen through the eyes of the poor mad actress” (Programme). Just so, in an interview Griffiths insists upon the fictionality of her new play by speaking through Trish who “is being very mysterious about it. . . . She won’t admit to a link” (Zeitoun 33).

¹⁰⁸ As discussed in Chapter 1, although it was Sid Adelman who wrote the accusatory article about *O.D. on Paradise*, members of the Theatre Passe Muraille community suspect Gina Mallet played a part in the slander. Mallet did write at times as if she were Passe Muraille’s antagonist. For example, her report on their 1983 renovations, “Gone at last is the feeling, upon entering TPM, that you will be handed finger paints and told to get on with the decoration. TPM, finally, is taking its appearance seriously” (Mallet, “Theatre Works”).

Since her illness affects her perspective, this play foundationally rests upon truth that has been distorted into fiction. This transformation is both a result of Trish's illness and the nature of her theatrical performance.

The stage directions to the play confirm a link to Griffiths's life as a theatre artist because Trish "*tells a tale of the theatre*" (Griffiths, *Spiral* 3). During her conversations with Maria Campbell, in a part that did not find its way into *The Book of Jessica*, Griffiths becomes unsure, "I don't know what I'm trying to say. . . . I still don't tell my stories back to you, whatever they are. Maybe I don't have any, maybe I do. And if they are they'd probably be theatre stories, but they might not be" (Campbell and Griffiths, *Tape 5*). In an interview published much earlier (1983), Griffiths similarly tells Muriel Leeper, "I am always thinking about theatre; it is always on my mind. In a way, I never meet anyone or do anything without thinking about it and translating it into theatre terms" (Leeper 112). All together, these traces reveal that the most insightful note is that "[t]here are a million stories in the Dirty Theatre, this is merely one of them" (Programme; Griffiths, *Spiral* 39). This play is Linda Griffiths's story about Theatre Passe Muraille, but she tells it with her methods.

Indeed, this work is Griffiths's first autobiographical play, translucent as it may be. It lacks the markers of transparent self-creation since the speaker is named Trish, but Griffiths embodies this character, addressing the audience in the first-person. Furthermore, while the plot of *The Darling Family* stems from an event in Griffiths's personal life that is neither made public nor known so widely within the community, the

same cannot be said of *Spiral Woman and the Dirty Theatre*. As discussed in Chapter 1, the *O.D. on Paradise* scandal becomes infamous in the history of Theatre Passe Muraille. Trish goes so far as to describe the stage manager of The Paradise Play on opening night “sitting in front of a big bag of strawberry tea rolling tea into joints as props for the show” (Griffiths, *Spiral* 31). Griffiths may not want to implicate the theatre or anyone specifically, but it seems that through writing and telling Trish’s story of mystical entrapment the actor-playwright gains an opportunity to think through her own experiences and the difficulties she has faced as an artist in the theatre. This play is the first example of Griffiths taking her problems to the theatre and telling her own “theatre stories.”

The number of documents and drafts in the Linda Griffiths *fonds* relating to this play reveals it one of her many attempts at telling her theatre story. Griffiths’s work on this piece has its earliest traces in 1986. Notices appear in Toronto newspapers, the *Toronto Star*, for example, advertising: “Writer/actress Linda Griffiths will give a free performance of *The Speed Christmas*, her latest work in progress . . . in Theatre Passe Muraille” on Saturday, December 18, 1986, at 11 pm (“Linda Griffiths Stages Free Show Saturday” C4). Nothing else remains of this night. However, the title connects the project with short stories published in 1993, both titled “The Speed Christmas.” The same short

story, which is narrated by an unnamed actress, appears in *Prairie Schooner* and *Canadian Woman Studies*, although this piece is not set specifically in a theatre.¹⁰⁹

She recalls spending a night out with an explicit motive: “I wasn’t going to go home that night. I wasn’t going to be alone and I wasn’t going to go home” (Griffiths, “The Speed Christmas” 60). The next morning Bob, her companion’s friend and the only named character, visits. The story follows the trio’s afternoon exploits. Eventually Bob departs but the remaining pair go to the actress’s home where they partake in the titular narcotic and he asks, “You’re the real thing, aren’t you? You are. What if you’re the real thing?” (Griffiths, “The Speed Christmas” 61). While she considers possible answers, this plot becomes overtaken by a parallel recollection of her adolescence because “The question cut deep, deeper than he knew” (Griffiths, “The Speed Christmas” 61). She recalls her friend’s brother “snarl[ing]” at her, asking, “Are you for real?” (Griffiths, “The Speed Christmas” 62). She transforms the story into a consideration of her quest for approval, “I lied. . . . You could call it pretending. When you’re a child they call it pretending, adults often enjoy the strange and exotic airs of such a little girl. But later it comes to be something else. Phony baloney. And, worst of all, if this pimpled sloucher could see it, everyone could see it,” which leads to a derogatory and self-critical thought:

¹⁰⁹ Griffiths specifically uses this terminology in the body of “The Speed Christmas” published in *Prairie Schooner* that begins “Trish, the actress, speaks” (Griffiths, “The Speed Christmas” 111). The same diction, but in French, is used in a preliminary summary to the *Canadian Woman Studies* publication, “Une actrice” (Griffiths, “The Speed Christmas” 60). Mary-Lou Zeitoun, after interviewing Griffiths for a piece in *Eye*, explains the word choice by describing Trish as “an underground actress (not *actor*—Trish is not liberated)” (Zeitoun 33).

“They all knew I was truly a worthless being” (Griffiths, “The Speed Christmas” 62).

This story ultimately concludes on the concept of women seeking approval for their internal and external qualities from those around them, especially men. Connected with the actress’s profession, she also speaks about gaining this approval by pretending, lying, or acting.

This short story hardly resembles Griffiths’s 1993 play, but small yet significant details overlap. Early in her story Trish says, “I had tried to escape from the Clan, two weeks ago I had wandered into a bar on the hip party strip of our city after closing a truly brutal show” (Griffiths, *Spiral* 8). The two narratives intersect when Trish recalls, “I have said, in an attempt to be shocking, that I would have gone home with an elephant that night, but not so, I would only have gone home with a Writer” (Griffiths, *Spiral* 8). She summarizes their encounter, which also includes speed and scotch, although there is no embedded narrative of her feelings of worthlessness stemming from adolescence. However, the publication of Griffiths’s short story in *Prairie Schooner* specifies “The Speed Christmas” is an “excerpt from *Spiral Woman*,” while *Canadian Woman Studies* includes a short biographical paragraph at the end of the piece that details “*The Speed Christmas* is part of a novel-in-progress, *Virtue or Death*” (Griffiths, “The Speed Christmas” 111; Griffiths, “The Speed Christmas” 62).¹¹⁰ Numerous documents in the

¹¹⁰ I want to respect that while *Spiral Woman and the Dirty Theatre* is an intriguing piece, the prose version is incomplete. This piece does leave an unfinished thread to Griffiths’s career that relates to her biography. It would be incredibly curious to pick up on Griffiths’s biography to explore Sherrill Grace’s thought, “I am also intrigued by the challenge

Linda Griffiths *fonds* relate to work on these varying titles and forms, and with intersecting narratives. The first few pages of one draft, without any explicative markers of title or date, contain a description of a central character that combines the protagonist of “The Speed Christmas” and that of *Spiral Woman and the Dirty Theatre*.¹¹¹ This document proves that each smaller piece is a section of the whole: Linda Griffiths’s unfinished novel. Her attempts at this narrative have taken many forms, but the majority of the archival materials are manuscripts of her novel. Although the subject of my dissertation is Griffiths’s theatre, a diverting exploration into these manuscripts reveals that even in this prose writing her artistic eye very much remains on the theatre.

Spiral Woman’s organization in the PDF document available for purchase through Playwrights Guild of Canada’s online Canadian Play Outlet suggests it remains at the stage of process rather than product. Initially this document presents as a play text with a chronology and credits of the premiere proceeding from the script. Trish’s monologue comprises the next eight pages until there is a page break. The following page is titled “The Red Spray Can—an Excerpt from ‘Spiral Woman and the Dirty Theatre’ by Linda Griffiths” (Griffiths, *Spiral* 12). Considering the title of this play and some versions of Griffiths’s novel are the same, yet that the title of a short story is marked by quotation

contemporary biographers face when dealing with the lives of theatre people, and I wonder if the life and art of such a subject affects the biographer’s craft—but this is a large topic for another occasion, albeit one that has received, to my knowledge, almost no critical attention” (Grace, “Towards a Theory” 77n2).

¹¹¹ This document’s first page begins “*Trish, the actress, speaks,*” but is different from *Spiral Woman and the Dirty Theatre* in form and content (Griffiths, *Novel Manuscript, Undated and Untitled 1*).

marks, the origins and purpose of the excerpt are unknown.¹¹² After five pages of this prose, void of markers of a play text, there is another page break. The script resumes until the end of the play twenty-one pages later, pronounced by “The End” (Griffiths, *Spiral* 38). The following page reiterates the programme notes denying the play’s nonfictional roots and noting the length of the performance (Griffiths, *Spiral* 39). However, there are two final pages of prose, titled “Ending” (Griffiths, *Spiral* 40). Each section of prose included in the script contains different plot points than the play. Therefore, this document suggests that the translation from novel to play is incomplete.

There is a twofold significance to Griffiths translating her prose work into this solo show. *Spiral Woman and the Dirty Theatre* premieres during Theatre Passe Muraille’s 25th anniversary season. Archival material reveals Griffiths participates in other celebratory events during this season and that Artistic Director Layne Coleman relies on Griffiths’s celebrity within the theatre community to continue working towards the company’s financial relief. At the same time, by only thinly veiling her story as Trish’s, Griffiths creates a voice which is autobiographical in nature and interrogates as well as commemorates her career at Theatre Passe Muraille.

Griffiths participates in Theatre Passe Muraille’s 25th anniversary season (1992-93), which reminisces upon the community’s past. While this play is a fragment of her novel, its relationship to what has become Theatre Passe Muraille lore means it must also

¹¹² I suspect these prose pages are Griffiths’s way of putting the intended form of this story into the publication of the play. Although she did translate her prose into a performance twice, most of her work on the project is in the form of a novel.

be considered through this context. Earlier in 1993, Theatre Passe Muraille holds a 25th Anniversary Jubilee on February 14 that is advertised in the *Globe and Mail*: “Past Artistic Director Paul Thompson leads a stellar cast of TPM alumnae, including Graham Greene, Cathy Jones, Eric Peterson and Don Herron among others in this fundraising celebration” (“Arts and Entertainment Across Canada: An Advertising Feature” C2). This event exemplifies Theatre Passe Muraille’s use of their building in this decade as “a spatial commemoration of the company’s own history,” which “helped restore the company to a measure of its former health” (McKinnie, *City Stages* 87). As McKinnie explains, “many of the practitioners from Passe Muraille’s first decade were prominently involved. These included Paul Thompson, actor David Fox, Jim Garrard, actor-writer Linda Griffiths, and Miles Potter” (*City Stages* 88). A recording of the jubilee remains in the Theatre Passe Muraille Collection. This night’s content and recurring themes confirm both the theatre’s emphasis upon its history and demonstrates how the community came together to participate in this nostalgia. Griffiths performs a sketch relating to *Maggie & Pierre* near both the beginning and the end of the night. She participates in this nostalgic commemoration in both the Jubilee and with the premiere of *Spiral Woman and the Dirty Theatre* in this season.¹¹³

¹¹³ How this play aligns with Theatre Passe Muraille’s programming, which “increasingly recalled its early and most famous collective creations” while also critiquing it, would be an interesting research project (McKinnie, *City Stages* 88). In “Portrait of the Artist as Artist: The Celebration of Autobiography” Jenn Stephenson interrogates how “the basic duality at the heart of the embodiment convention . . . allow[s] both actual actor and fictional character to coexist, such that the audience engages primarily with the fictional character, but without

This play's focus on Theatre Passe Muraille's previous successes aligns with how their programming transitions during the 1990s. However, Trish's monologue interweaves numerous characters and plots that lead to three distinct and consequential conclusions. These endings connect with an underlying darkness of the narrative that reveals Griffiths's voice underneath Trish's. When asked what she is protecting, Trish replies: "The energy I worked my ass off to create" (Griffiths, *Spiral* 27). Soon after, a stage direction describes "At great personal cost, Trish drives herself on to retain the world of the Dirty Theatre and tell her story, even if madness lies at the end" (Griffiths, *Spiral* 28). These events have taken a great toll on Trish, including this moment of reliving them. Importantly, just before Trish speaks about the process of her work she says "Visionary stuff can be magic, and, diluted a thousand times, truth" (Griffiths, *Spiral* 25). In an almost magical transformation, each ending also alchemically concludes a thread of Griffiths's career.

The first ending concludes The Paradise Play narrative as Trish calls on the Dirty Theatre community, of which she is a part, to take partial responsibility for the scandal, "I am wrong to present us as innocents. . . . We asked for the enemy to be present, goaded them, blew smoke in their faces" (Griffiths, *Spiral* 34). Having accepted her responsibility in the difficulties as well as the failure of the remount, Trish narrates the set

forgetting the provisionally absent actor" (Stephenson, "Portrait of the Artist as Artist: The Celebration of Autobiography" 177). Indeed, *Spiral Woman and the Dirty Theatre* provides another example of "a rare piece of site-specific autobiographical performance," as Stephenson says of TJ Dawe's *Totem Figures* (Stephenson, "Portrait of the Artist as Artist: The Celebration of Autobiography" 181).

being dismantled, the beautiful design and props decaying. She hints the significance of the play's closing, "[a]s if it was the ordinary set of an ordinary show that didn't do well and closed early. Which, of course, was also true" (Griffiths, *Spiral* 34–35). Although the play did not succeed this time, not an unusual event at 1980s Theatre Passe Muraille, Trish makes it clear that the seemingly quotidian action of disassembling the set was no ordinary task. Having made these statements, Trish "*turns her back and walks away, as if to end her story*" but it is not the end (Griffiths, *Spiral* 35).

Because this play tells her version of the events, Trish focuses the next section on her illness. Griffiths's own description of her solo character is quite telling: "Trish is an underground actress who is essentially insane, bitter and bedridden with a mysterious illness. . . . She's trying to find the right spell to get rid of her illness. . . . She's trapped within her body, and her mind is locked until she can find this spell" (Zeitoun 33). As she "*settles near her bed's headboard and turns back*" the audience is reminded that Trish's involvement in The Paradise Play has left her seeking a spell to cure her bedridden state (Griffiths, *Spiral* 35). In fact, she remains trapped on the bed that is this current play's set. Trish makes a bald statement that applies directly to the 25th anniversary season, "Now the vestiges of the ragged clan are trying to cash in on its romance. . . . Nostalgic plays of clanish invalids litter the city, eulogizing the past, it makes me puke" (Griffiths, *Spiral* 35). Trish also comments on the Clan's past, the part of Theatre Passe Muraille's history that starts Griffiths career. "What did we think?" she asks, "That a group of silly actors in a van on a highway was the Country? Yes and more" (Griffiths, *Spiral* 35).

There is, however, some hope as “[t]he young clans don’t think all is lost” (Griffiths, *Spiral* 35). Within these statements Griffiths travels through the points in Theatre Passe Muraille’s history with which she has been most involved. Earliest in the chronology, she acknowledges the nationalist philosophies of collective creation, both questioning it and affirming her participation in them. Her stance on the nostalgic focus of the more recent years, on the other hand, receives a much more critical review. Finally, her statement about the young clans implies that although there is hope for the future of this theatre, it no longer rests with her.

As Trish concludes her account of the Dirty Theatre’s history her movements change from the spiral movements which have come to represent her illness as well as her blocked mind. During a transition to the final piece of the ending “[t]here is something sinuous about her movement” as she “pulls out a notebook that has been hidden behind a pillow” (Griffiths, *Spiral* 35). This action perfectly aligns Griffiths with Trish as it represents the performer acknowledging the fact of the play. For this piece to come to fruition Griffiths has pulled out a hidden novel-in-progress. She also brings it to the stage and now reads it to the audience. Griffiths enacts the stage direction she writes for Trish: “Settling herself, she begins to read” (Griffiths, *Spiral* 36).

What follows is a truly invented narrative, an imagined resolution to Trish’s relationship with the Dirty Theatre. A description of the Spider Woman Critic is followed by Trish carrying this creature to the theatre. In a reimagining of Gina Mallet’s evening at

O.D. on Paradise the critic accuses “‘Put me behind a pole! Behind a pole, that’s where you always put me!’” (36). But Trish narrates,

I am using my actor’s soft benevolent voice, used for characters who are right. ‘Not behind a pole, I know there are many poles here, but there are also many places to see the stage,’ and carefully I place her in the centre of the audience. Her tentacles are knotted in my hair.” (36)

Having placed her antagonist in the audience Trish climbs on the stage where she mimes bringing various individuals from her past onto the stage with her until “there is a whole city of theatre types on the stage” (37). Together, this imagined group of real theatre personalities take a bow, “[s]uch a rare thing at the Dirty Theatre” comments Trish (38). Their bows occur “almost at the same moment,” but the Clan does not expect anything from the Spider Woman. In addition, as Trish carries the critic outside she “let[s] the moment go” when she receives one more piece of criticism (Griffiths, *Spiral* 38).¹¹⁴

Trish has told the end of these three layers of her life in the theatre. Intensity pouring from Griffiths the performer, this play comes to its true conclusion as these many characters fade away and we are left with Trish who declares, “my mysterious illness has

¹¹⁴ Griffiths clearly has an antagonistic relationship with this critic. In fact, upon Griffiths’s receipt of multiple Dora Awards for *Maggie & Pierre*, Mallet reports “Linda Griffiths and Theatre Passe Muraille” as some of “the big winners last night” (Mallet, “Dora Awards a Refreshing Theatre Event” D1). However, she goes on to grant Griffiths with another award, “**The Marlon Brando/Kate Lynch Award for Self-righteousness:** To Linda Griffiths, who won for *Maggie And Pierre* (Writing and acting). She was in Calgary and sent a telephone message deploring the handing out of awards” (Mallet, “Dora Awards a Refreshing Theatre Event” D1). Unlike Trish, Griffiths did not let this go. Instead, she sent a letter to the *Toronto Star* which I discuss further in the final chapter, Linda’s Legacy.

not disappeared with the Spring. But I think I know the name of the spell I called up that winter so long ago. The name of the spell...is change” (Griffiths, *Spiral* 38).¹¹⁵ Trish spirals before a blackout, but the final stage directions also prescribe the audience’s reaction afterwards, “*Wild applause and the unrestrained stomping of feet and she, and the musician, bow. They are called back again and again...*” (Griffiths, *Spiral* 38). This moment harkens to an earlier one when the Spider Woman Critic’s spot behind the pole is empty, yet *The Paradise Play* continues: “As for the ending, it’s rare in so restrained a city for people to stomp their feet, rarer to have them whistle, cheer, call the hysterical actors back again and again. The spell completed itself” (Griffiths, *Spiral* 33). This first spell traps Trish in her mind, bed, and makes her ill after audiences rave about *O.D. on Paradise* but two reviewers leave during the intermission. Meanwhile, this magical change will undo the first illness-causing spell.

Magic and elements of the fantastic run throughout this play and come directly from Trish, who in the play says “Some feel that the theatre would cure me, they talk of getting me back on the stage. That would be a laugh. But the theatre gods are only just so powerful, not as powerful as a locked mind. Not as powerful as wayward magic, turned in on itself” (Griffiths, *Spiral* 19). Griffiths believes the theatre to be spiritual, but here

¹¹⁵ Meanwhile, the prose “Ending” included in the PDF of *Spiral Woman and the Dirty Theatre* is much more accusatory. The speaker screams that alcohol is poison, asking “How many brilliant great wild crazy people do I have to see destroying themselves for everybody to get the idea? . . . We put the life of the theatre in this city back twenty years assholes” (Griffiths, *Spiral* 40–41). However, she concludes by commenting, “I had a glass of wine to calm me down from my tantrum, I don’t want people to think I’m a teetotaler. But something did come to me in the fury of the moment. The name of the spell is change” (Griffiths, *Spiral* 41).

the theatre gods are not enough. Those in the audience who have been privy to the stories Trish tells also understand they have likewise affected the actor standing before them and that Griffiths herself speaks. Griffiths transparently playing Trish stands and “*glares at the audience, bloody but unbowed*” (Griffiths, *Spiral* 38). She is staring at those nostalgically celebrating the 25 years of Theatre Passe Muraille that have taken their toll on her body and mind. By translating her prose into a play for Theatre Passe Muraille’s 25th anniversary celebrations Griffiths uses the opportunity to declare change. She starkly refuses future participation in nostalgic commemoration of Theatre Passe Muraille’s past. Instead, she passes the history of Theatre Passe Muraille to the next generation.

The act of bringing this work live to the stage in Theatre Passe Muraille’s Backspace provides an insight into why the premiere of her next play is not until 1998. Change takes time. *Spiral Woman and the Dirty Theatre* is a tale of the theatre about the titular characters, Griffiths and Passe Muraille. Reliving, celebrating, but leaving this script in the realm of progress frees Griffiths so she can move forward as a playwright-actor defined by her own “natural game” rather than a name to be found in a list of greats reliving the golden times of Theatre Passe Muraille. Trish taking a bow and being called back on stage is at once a celebration of Theatre Passe Muraille’s Golden Age and Griffiths marking the end of her own era.

Looking at *The Darling Family: A Duet for Three*, *A Game of Inches*, and *Spiral Woman and the Dirty Theatre* together it becomes clear that each play at its core focuses on a woman facing a crisis that is both individually her own and one that speaks to the

experience of a large number of women. As Stephenson outlines in the anthology on *Solo Performance*, “The ability to speak oneself into being and by doing so not only declare one’s self but also to imagine new possible selves grants significant performative power to the self-reflexive performer” (Stephenson, “Introduction: Solo Performance” ix). Just so, SHE faces a trying relationship and an exploration of her spirituality, her goals, and her self. Pamela discovers how to work towards winning in a way that does not cause her to betray herself and leads towards her self-actualization. Trish finds a way to bow that celebrates her history on the Dirty Theatre’s stage while declaring change. Pivotaly, Griffiths creates each woman and brings her to life on stage. The discovery which began this chapter, the hidden personal inspiration behind *The Darling Family*, also commences a new and fundamentally different understanding of Griffiths’s exploration of auto/biographical performance.

Chapter 3

Auto/Biography: Fantastical History and Self-Creation

I want them all to know you can't just get rid of women like me. We stick.
—Linda Griffiths, “Duchess” 243

“I’ve never written a biographical play” is the first line of Griffiths’s “I Am a Thief...Not Necessarily Honourable Either” (Griffiths, “Thief” 301). She goes on, “All I know is that I have written more plays inspired by real people than any other Canadian playwright, so something must be going on” (Griffiths, “Thief” 301). Having traced Griffiths’s development as an actor-playwright from her early years working in collective creation (1971-1979) through the seven plays she creates from 1980 to 1993, it becomes clear she takes a substantial pause from production after *Spiral Woman and the Dirty Theatre*, which premieres in 1993, while her next full-length play, *The Duchess*, does not premiere until 1998. Griffiths enacts change within her work during this next stage in her career that spans the creation of *The Duchess a.k.a. Wallis Simpson* (1998), *Alien Creature: A Visitation from Gwendolyn MacEwen* (1999), and *Chronic* (2003).

In this chapter I focus on articulating the “something” that is indeed “going on” in Griffiths’s plays about real people. With *The Duchess* and *Alien Creature* Griffiths creates two of the most iconic and influential plays of her career. The central character, Wallis Simpson and Gwendolyn MacEwen respectively, speaks her own self-representation. Griffiths draws material from the subject’s public life, and from the

representation created by others, as well as from her own writing. A magical essence surrounds each woman in the performance of her self-representation. These plays are incredibly theatrical rather than being any sort of biographical or documentary text.

Griffiths articulates her understanding of her plays' relationship to biography in "I Am a Thief...Not Necessarily Honourable Either," published in *Theatre and AutoBiography: Writing and Performing Lives in Theory and Practice* (2006). For a section comprised of contributions from theatre artists themselves, Jerry Wasserman "asked each of the playwrights six basic questions about their work" (291). Griffiths concludes "I Am a Thief" by answering Wasserman's final subset of questions: "How much obligation, if any, do you feel to recreate the 'truth' of the original character or story? Do you believe there is such a thing as historical truth? What, if any, are the ethical issues" (292). Griffiths responds:

The differences between theatrical biography and written biography are as huge as the differences between the written word and theatre. Theatre is ephemeral and always will be, so open to interpretation that even historical truth is subject to it—to the subjective, physical nature of theatre itself. Yet to say the theatre must be free is to say that nothing should bind us, and that can't be. To say we have to be chained to someone else's idea of truth also can't be. I am a thief. Maybe an honest thief, a human thief, but still a thief. I'm not necessarily honourable either. I have to serve the theatre. I shouldn't be a model for anyone in this" (Griffiths, "Thief" 305).

Griffiths's astute reflections serve as a foundation for this chapter because she does not investigate truth. Instead, these plays she interrogates the effect theatre and performance have on this concept.

Rather than considering if she recreates truth or if historical truth exists, she begins with her medium, theatre, which at its very core is a fictional, illusory genre. Griffiths, in this chapter and from the first moments of *The Duchess*, reminds us that the performance of a script, the moment of live theatre, is ephemeral and cannot be preserved or replicated. At the same time, it is part of a spectator's lived experience and she feels responsible to her subject as well as a need "to serve the theatre," to create broader significance from the performance (Griffiths, "Thief" 305). She represents and plays these two women, but does so for the explicit purpose of performing women with power for her audience. Griffiths explores a concept she expressed even in her early days with theatre troupe The Bezumba Girls, "We want you to look into your own life...are you doing this action because you've been taught to do it; because you are a woman and that's part of your sex-typing, or is it because you really want to do it" (Robb). In *The Duchess* and *Alien Creature* Griffiths brings the talent and skill developed during her nearly-thirty years working in Canadian theatre to appeal to her audiences and continue this mission. Taking all of these components together, the central concern of this chapter is to observe how Griffiths embraces this magical sense of theatre and creates plays for her audience, which also allows the central figure to recreate her own self-representation.

3.1 *The Duchess, a.k.a. Wallis Simpson: Interrogating Women's Self-Representation*

Griffiths reflects on the relationship between historical truth and *The Duchess, a.k.a. Wallis Simpson* in the programme for the production's premiere. She responds to the questions "Is it true? What is historically true?" by explaining, "The basic story is totally true. That the King of England (Edward VIII) abdicated his throne in 1936 for a twice-divorced American commoner, Wallis Simpson" (Programme). And yet, she immediately contradicts any stable sense of truth, "There is a fantastical, mythological element to the play that doesn't include documentary fact. The plot is a mix of fact and fantasy" (Programme). Years later, Griffiths recalls her navigation into how much information to provide the audience in *The Duchess*, "there was a challenge, a relationship with the audience based on their previous assumptions and information I chose to give. This was a bad woman and they expected her to be bad. In this case I chose to go toward those expectations—with various twists" (Griffiths, "Thief" 305). Griffiths considers her relationship as actor-playwright to representing the life of her subject and to her audience. Upon her return to creating biographically inspired plays, therefore, Griffiths does not embed herself in expectations of performing historical truth. Instead, she keeps her audience's expectations in mind while also creating a powerful, autonomous, and challenging biographically based character.

In this indeterminate space between biographizing a life, one which participated in royal history, and creating a fantastical moment of theatre, Griffiths writes and

performs *The Duchess, a.k.a. Wallis Simpson*. It opens on January 31st, 1998, in the mainspace of Theatre Passe Muraille. The complex script requires seven actors to play thirty-six characters. While some are historically based, others are fictional or pure fantasy. Astrid Jansen designs the set and costumes, Paul Thompson directs. Griffiths creates a multi-leveled play that requires experienced theatre practitioners to come together and create what is, ultimately, Wallis's world.

This play's narrative tells a kaleidoscopic historical tale of Wallis Simpson whose love affair with Edward VIII led to the abdication crisis in 1936. Wallis's first and second husbands appear in the early scenes of the play, which provide the audience with fragments of Wallis's life before entering the royal family's social circle. The first act follows the transformation of the central character from American commoner to triumphant, determined socialite who keeps company with the heir to the British throne. The second act continues to follow the historically true relationship of Wallis Simpson and Edward VIII as he abdicates the throne to marry her. Their marriage demotes them to the Duke and Duchess of Windsor. They spend time on the Nahlin yacht, continue to socialize with the upper crust of their society, and have a historically founded yet completely imagined encounter with Hitler that is devoid of morality. Exiled to the Bahamas, Wallis creates a Kingdom in the "void," which is just "the real world, where we watch them live together until Edward's death (Griffiths, "Duchess" 289, 288).¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ This and all subsequent quotations are from *The Duchess a.k.a. Wallis Simpson* published in *Sheer Nerve* (1999) rather than the text published with *Maggie & Pierre* by Playwright's

Interspersed amongst this linear narrative are Faerie scenes in a world built from Celtic mythology and superimposed on these historical events. While Wallis remains herself throughout, the auxiliary characters comprise “*The Society Chorus*,” who are represented by the remaining six actors (Griffiths, “Duchess” 244). Stage directions describe this troupe as “*like a commedia dell’arte company. They transform into all future characters yet somehow remain themselves*” (Griffiths, “Duchess” 244). Griffiths specifies that these “characters are at their most effective when a balance is found between their comic potential and the reality of their emotions and situation . . . it won’t work if no one has any fun. That’s Faerie for you” (Griffiths, “Playwright’s Notes”). While the plot focuses on Wallis’s story it also travels into a fictional performance both in its theatricality and the titular character’s “Faerie Queen” realm. Griffiths places the play’s historically true story line within a realm of fairy tales, goblins, and the duchess’s personified jewels.

Griffiths’s *Duchess* did not start as the centre of a complex kaleidoscopic play that intertwines historical truth and the Faerie realm. Tracing her process provides another opportunity to watch as Griffiths plays with form to better align it with the conceptualization of her subject. She takes the piece in process to production at multiple

Canada Press (2015). For the former, Griffiths was both the writer and embodied Wallis in performance. This script is therefore the one in which the central character truly is her Wallis (see programme notes above). In 2015, she works with those putting on the production to edit the script, but Griffiths is not involved as centrally as in the 1998 premiere. These later changes from Griffiths the writer do deserve in-depth analysis, but here I explore the earlier version.

stages, rather than remaining in workshops, and therefore learns from performing for audiences as Wallis Simpson. Over the course of this multi-staged process Griffiths moulds this retelling of Simpson's life into a multi-layered theatrical biography. An analysis of the play's frame reveals Griffiths's grappling with the foundational elements of creating a life on the stage. The frame she creates serves to dismantle existing reductive expectations by intertwining fact and fiction to create a performance that is both historical and fantastical. By immediately eschewing expectations, of gender and of predetermined assumptions, Griffiths recomposes Simpson's representation and leans into the complexities of her life and of her character. In *The Duchess* and as Wallis Simpson Griffiths returns to the fundamental elements of creating biography in the theatre and reimagines the historically based source material in order to unsettle assumptions about women's representation in general and for Wallis in particular.

Griffiths develops this play over the course of many years, experimenting with multiple forms, working with many actors, as well as writing and rewriting countless drafts. In "Process?" Griffiths headlines this play as "Using every one of the previous processes and then some" (Griffiths, "Process?" 61). She takes the core elements of Wallis Simpson's story and of her character to create this complicated and beautifully nuanced self-representation. Watching the evolution of both the form and Wallis's place in the narrative, demonstrates once again Griffiths's reliance upon discovery in process.

Griffiths's initial foray with creating a piece about Simpson takes the form of a radio play.¹¹⁷ *The Duchess: Pieces of Wallis Simpson* broadcasts over the CBC Stereo network on the 19th of March 1993 ("Pieces" 126). Published in *Adventures for (Big) Girls: Seven Radio Plays*, this initial piece bears some resemblance, in form, to the later product. Griffiths plays Wallis who narrates and who is the only character not doubled. Nine actors accompany this Wallis, but the majority receive very little characterization, such as Male One-Three, Count, Countess, and Reporter One-Three.¹¹⁸ The piece also incorporates music composed by Nic Gotham ("Pieces" 126). The Society Chorus begins the play with a "Sung or chanted" introduction of Wallis's character, "She was from Baltimore,/But she had style. . . . A commoner caught the King/(And she wasn't even young)" ("Pieces" 130).

The spinal elements of the play are present in this early draft, which include the frame, the chorus, the use of character doubling, and the quintessential narration by Noel Coward. As Griffiths develops the script she continues strengthening the self-representation of the central character with these aspects that build so much depth in *The*

¹¹⁷ Griffiths first performs as Wallis Simpson in *Passion and Paradise*, a television miniseries that aired in 1989. In a review entitled "Trashy and overblown but you've got to love the style" Hester Riches lauds Griffiths as "marvellously bitchy as the Duchess of Windsor" (Riches). At this time in Griffiths's career she is editing the transcripts from her conversations with Maria Campbell into *The Book of Jessica*. The time between filming the miniseries in 1988, the radio play in 1993, and the premiere of *The Duchess* in 1998 indicates the extensive work Griffiths puts into this play.

¹¹⁸ "Produced and directed in Toronto by Banuta Rubess," the cast is comprised of Linda Griffiths, Charlie Thomlinson, Pat Hamilton, Paul Bettis, Eric Peterson, Cynthia Eastman, Robert Persichini, Karen Kenedy, Andrew Scorer, and Michael Healy (Griffiths, "Pieces" 126).

Duchess a.k.a. Wallis Simpson. Griffiths first explains her decision to write about Wallis in the “Introduction” to the radio play, “I like climbers, I like outrageous women, I like stories where a lot happens,” and says the “journey” that Edward and Wallis travel “contains the elements of all great stories” (“Pieces” 127). Overtly viewing historical events as a narrative, she also explores Wallis’s psychology. Griffiths hypothesizes that “Simpson thought a king could do anything. Her belief in the powers of monarchies came from the naivete of someone from a democracy . . . she found herself face to face with the Archbishop of Canterbury, British tradition and the truly obsessive love of one man” (“Pieces” 127). These insightful observations reveal Griffiths’s foundational thinking. She conceives of transforming these lives into a play as being rooted in narrative and Simpson’s inner world. “In Wallis Simpson we find a woman with huge energy, passion, anger, humour, bitchery, ingenuity and intelligence. The power that could have run a mega-business in another age was harnessed to one unfocussed activity: climbing” (“Pieces” 128).

Griffiths’s thoughts at this earliest phase of creating Wallis indicate the evolution of her conceptualization of her subject. In the programme for the premiere production, she briefly explains her grappling with the various representations of Wallis that became available to her, “The Wallis I first started to know was a woman I read about in countless books, including her own autobiography” (Programme).¹¹⁹ Indeed, a core

¹¹⁹ She goes on, “Then I began to hear about her. People whispered things to me at parties, a man told me to touch his hand because she had once touched his, I got a phone call from

illustration of how this radio play creates Wallis is the character of Aunt Bessie that Griffiths creates from Simpson's memoir, *The Heart Has Its Reasons*. In her "Prefatory Note" Simpson cites her Aunt Bessie Merryman as an authenticating resource for this self-representation, "she can look backward down a long and complicated road, citing dates and episodes as far back, in fact, as my first young people's party, which must have been in Teddy Roosevelt's time" (Simpson 13). Simpson explains that she requires such a source since she herself is "undocumented," using her husband's term (Simpson 14). She explains,

living, as I did, for the moment, I never saved letters, never kept a diary, never treasured personal documents or mementoes. But perhaps this is an advantage for a woman; for the important things in a woman's life do not lend themselves readily to the ordered logic of the filing system so important to the male mind. So in my undocumented state my story cannot aspire to be a history; it can only be the simple record of my hopes, my thoughts, my dreams, my sorrows, my joys. (Simpson 14)

By defining her life in this way Simpson sets herself apart from a linear concept of memory and questions the credibility of attempts at archival reconstruction. Instead, she

someone who wanted to tell me about her medical conditions. And that was another Wallis" (Programme). These insights are helpful and develop a sense of the rumour that surrounds the royal couple. Even as I write this chapter, the *Globe and Mail* has recently published an article about the architecture of a building in Toronto that begins by referencing the relationship between Wallis and Edward, "To those who know it, it remains one of the most romantic love stories of all time" (LeBlanc H4).

defines the pages to follow as a “record” of the feelings and experiences that can only be drawn from her perspective and pertain to her personal life rather than the broader concept of history. In the search to fulfil the external requirements of documentation, rather than self-authenticating her story, Wallis effectively divides the power of her self-representation between herself and her Aunt Bessie.

In this division Wallis in her autobiography does not give herself as much power and control as Griffiths does in *The Duchess*. Griffiths searches for a form in process to return agency to the central character. With this concept in mind, it becomes clear that as Griffiths develops a piece about Wallis Simpson she searches for a form to adequately contain and portray this complex intertwining of history and fantasy with a multi-dimensional character at the centre. However, the core question of the radio play is at odds with Griffiths’s (and Wallis’s) ambitions. The playwright writes, “In this piece there is a central question. Did Wallis Simpson ‘love’ the ex-king?” (“Pieces” 128). Cynthia Zimmerman explores the remnants of this question in her insightful “Introduction” to the published script, “Wallis hardly seems to return [Edward’s] passion—essentially a cold but highly sexual woman—Edward is a believer: ‘One day you’ll realize you love me more than anything on earth,’ he says. In the end, he is right” (Zimmerman, “Introducing Wallis” ii). Zimmerman continues, “Griffiths, however, is interested in another far more theatrical angle on this famous romance” (Zimmerman, “Introducing Wallis” ii). Indeed, in the radio play Griffiths’s own conclusion indicates the next phases of the process, “After abdication, she created her kingdom in exile with the ferocity of a downed animal.

She invented a world where her ex-King would not look like a fool . . . But with Wallis, it always seemed to come down to one thing: did she really love him?” (“Pieces” 128). As Griffiths continues development, the “but” and Aunt Bessie becomes obsolete as Wallis likewise evolves into a more complex and intriguing character.

In 1995 Griffiths receives support from Alberta Theatre Projects for another phase of process for this piece (White). Griffiths explains in “Process?” that after writing the first draft solo, and without using her actor self, she begins working with Paul Thompson as well as a group of actors during a “ten-day improvisational workshop” (Griffiths, “Process?” 61). During this phase the actors, including Griffiths, and with Thompson’s input “improvise[] around, through and beyond the script” (Griffiths, “Process?” 61). This version of *The Duchess* is a musical that premieres in early 1996 at the Alberta Theatre Projects as part of the playRites ’96 festival.¹²⁰ Kate Taylor mentions in her review the festival’s dedication “to script development,” noting Griffiths’s “project certainly needs it” (D2). Griffiths correspondingly reveals that her question as playwright at this stage is “Should there be music in the play? (Griffiths, “Process?” 61). Audiences respond to the musical version well. Griffiths retains the five pages of feedback she receives from this production. Some statements reveal the audience’s lack of understanding of the fun, “is it a tragedy or a farce?,” their intrigue, “everyone wants to go read about her,” while others are equally overjoyed, calling it “exquisitely

¹²⁰ The cast includes Anne Anglin as Queen Mary, Kate Newby as Lady Elizabeth, Andrew Moodie as Noel Coward, Tom Rooney as Edward, John Blackwood as Mr. Simpson/Hitler, and Griffiths as Wallis (K. Taylor D2).

sacrilegious” (*Feedback Forms, Playrites '96: The Duchess* 1, 5). Interestingly, a number of spectators question the necessity of the music, “why a musical?” (*Feedback Forms, Playrites '96: The Duchess* 1). Whether influenced by these comments, by the reception, or by the feeling during performances, for Griffiths “it became clear that the play didn’t need the music; it got in the way. . . . So the music went, and the play became darker and more layered” (Griffiths, “Process?” 61).

After the 1996 production in Alberta Griffiths uses varying processes to delve into Wallis Simpson, “I felt I had to work more on the main character” (Griffiths, “Process?” 61). In order to do this work, she improvises “around Wallis” with Paul Thompson, “coming up with a couple of new scenes and a deeper understanding of the character. This material was then reworked back into the script” (Griffiths, “Process?” 61). Writing and rewriting, Griffiths develops Wallis and her world through two more drafts before taking *The Duchess a.k.a. Wallis Simpson* to its premiere production at Theatre Passe Muraille. “With only four weeks of rehearsal, it still had the feeling of process” she writes in “Process?” (Griffiths, “Process?” 61). Likewise, in the “Playwright’s Introduction” to the “*Opening Night Edition*” of the play Griffiths explains that the script she developed as a writer “moves faster now” thanks to the insights and input of the cast, “there are tiny moments that the actors’ instincts have honed, the quick words in the dressing room: ‘Do you mind if I don’t say...’ ‘What if I said...’ . . . Actors are like detectives, going through both the logic and the pulse of the play” (Griffiths, *Duchess, Opening Night Edition* 5). She imagines doing more edits before publishing the script

which will include those actors' instinctive changes that emerged from discoveries made during the process.

These varying stages of process demonstrate the reality of Griffiths's statement that for this play, "I decided the only way to do justice to the scope of the story was to think big or die in the attempt" (Griffiths, "Process?" 61). She experiments with form, explores the core self-representation, and performs various versions of Wallis Simpson to many audiences, both publicly and for fellow theatre practitioners. Griffiths as actor-playwright learns through experience how to portray this character in her own sense of theatrical biography.

Indeed, Cynthia Zimmerman concludes her "Introducing Wallis" with an incredibly astute paragraph,

Like Wallis herself, Griffiths's play is ambitious, bold, and irreverent.

Propelled by the sheer inventiveness of its exuberant style, the play is a heady mix of history, fantastical biography, mythology, parody, and broad political satire. It is also fun—full of witty observations, imitations, and theatrical surprises. These aspects are transparently entertaining; beneath them lies a complex script of genuine insights and multi-levelled meanings. A radical departure from the minimalist style so prevalent on current stages, Griffiths laughingly calls it 'maximalist.'" (Zimmerman, "Introducing Wallis" v)

An integral component of creating this richness is continuing to develop Simpson and the surrounding characters with her methods. As Griffiths has done previously, she

meticulously works through numerous drafts to discover the best way to create her imagined world for this historical figure. Ultimately, during the final rewrites for this beautifully nuanced text, which rests on the relationship between historical fact and the fantasy realm of Faerie, she tells herself “‘Okay, this is the Wallis I choose.’ I feel like it’s the right combination between what I want her to be and what she might have been” (Walker M1). Just so, in the programme Griffiths forewarns her audience, “I don’t know the real Wallis Simpson and never will . . . after what seemed like a long time, I began to realize that the only Wallis I would ever know was the woman I chose her to be” (Programme).

“There is a crash of thunder. The lights flash. As if torn from a storm, WALLIS is catapulted onto the stage, a mad old woman” (Griffiths, “Duchess” 242). Wallis arrives to rupture the initial action of the play: Noel Coward as auctioneer selling Edward and Wallis’s possessions. An archival trace remains of Griffiths’s inspiration in the form of a full-page advertisement for a Sotheby Auction of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor’s personal artefacts. A photo of the couple covers the top half of the page, with the superscript “A Royal Occasion,” while the remaining portion of the advertisement displays pictures of the items for sale interspersed amongst text that tempts “Own a piece of royal history” (*Sotheby’s Advertisement*). Griffiths creates a highly theatrical frame for the play inspired by the true sale of the couple’s possessions.

Wallis’s abrupt and theatrical appearance establishes that such an interruption is of an urgent nature. Indeed, the play begins not with the titular character but with this

playwright who gained notice in the 1920s walking onto the stage and addressing the audience: “Ladies and gentlemen, my name is Noel Coward. Please, no applause. Oh, well, if you insist” (Griffiths, “Duchess” 242). He therefore facilitates the sale of the Duchess’s personal belongings and accepts the night’s first acclamation. He goes on to tell the audience, “But what you are buying tonight is romance, and if you want to know whether or not they were Nazis, I refer you to seventeen conflicting accounts of every moment of their lives” (Griffiths, “Duchess” 242). By evading the audience’s search for historical truth Griffiths also critiques this type of representation, mocking these historical yet “conflicting accounts” (Griffiths, “Duchess” 242). While the play’s frame denies any sense of documentary truth, Noel also divests himself of responsibility for these real lives being represented. Therefore, Wallis arrives to stop Noel’s objectification of her personhood, an example of how she has often been treated. Indeed, she says “Yes, it’s true, it’s all true. It was my fault, the whole century. But that doesn’t mean they can steal my things, rip everything apart, sell to the highest bidder” (Griffiths, “Duchess” 242–43).

A final impact, the rupture of this objectifying opening, is the implication of the audience. Griffiths pairs the sale of Wallis’s personal items with each spectator’s lived reality of having bought a ticket to this performance. Noel addresses his opening monologue to the audience, “I am here to welcome you to the auction of the century. Tonight . . . we propose to auction off the entire possessions of the Duchess of Windsor, the infamous Wallis Simpson” (Griffiths, “Duchess” 242). The illusory action therefore

overlays each person's true ticket purchase. Moreover, Wallis's first words are spoken directly to an individual in the audience, "Oh, no you don't. Bid on that Emerald and I'll stab you to death with my hat pin" (Griffiths, "Duchess" 242). Just as she stops the dramatic action, she also denies the audience a chance to settle into a passive role as spectator. Instead, it is as if she insists the audience rid themselves of all expectations they have brought with them to the theatre. Wallis has arrived magically, ferociously, but also desperately. And she insists upon telling her own story because neither Noel nor the audience is getting it quite right.

As Griffiths makes clear to her audience in the programme, the Wallis of this play is her creation. Each performance, likewise, is Wallis's self-creation. Jenn Stephenson writes, "In the narrative of one's own life, events are selected, shaped, and sequenced. Other events are forgotten elided, or intentionally omitted. Autobiography, thus, is always a fictional construction, featuring an inescapable gap between the real-world referent and its fictional twin" (Stephenson, *Performing Autobiography: Contemporary Canadian Drama* 3). Wallis's desperation to interrupt Noel's retelling of her life indicates that she may adjust and augment, as is typical of the form. But she also makes it clear that biographical representations have done the same.

Throughout this scene Wallis makes multiple allusions and references to expectations and narrativization of women's characters, both historical in the form of Yoko Ono and fantastical with a description of Snow White. Wallis calls herself "the Yoko Ono of my generation" (Griffiths, "Duchess" 243). For an audience member

unaware of Wallis's status, this provides a tangible example of a woman for whom dislike reverberates from her personal life and through generations. She specifies, "Well, the king and I didn't make albums together, but the analogy still holds. I stole a king and made him betray his fans. I know what it is to be reviled" (Griffiths, "Duchess" 243). In "Living with the Duchess," a two-page feature in the *Toronto Star*, Griffiths speaks about Edward, "He had Diana like-star qualities. . . . He was incredibly good looking. He made efforts to touch people physically. He was unmarried. Then this outrage—the idea of this evil woman who goes and totally screws him around. He no longer belongs to the people; he belongs to Yoko" (Walker M1).

Noel begins a dialogue with Wallis that introduces the broader critique of women's representation. "I didn't expect to...conjure you up, so to speak" he admits. In reply she asks, "What did you expect? That my ghost would rest quietly in its little grave?" (Griffiths, "Duchess" 243). With the repetition of "expect" and calling her grave "little," Wallis once again confronts any presumptions placed upon her to remain within the strict confines provided to her by those writing and rewriting history. "I want them all to know you can't just get rid of women like me. We stick" (Griffiths, "Duchess" 243). Minimizing her sense of being looked over Noel says "I hope you wouldn't be bitter" to which she responds forcefully, "Oh, please. Once upon a time there was a poor girl, with hair as black as ebony, lips as red as blood, skin as white as snow, and a face like a plank. Oh, I know what they want. A Black Queen, full of curses and magic" (Griffiths, "Duchess" 243). Wallis's desire to be seen as a complex figure is in direct opposition to

the dualistic characters of good/bad provided by existing gender constructs. She inculcates the duality into which women are expected to fit, the only choices being beautiful Snow White or the jealous Evil Queen. Griffiths is aware of how Wallis has been judged, “People focused on her physicality. They said she wasn’t pretty; she was ugly. She had a horse face. As if it all would have been fine, if she had been a bombshell” (Walker M5). These points become emphatically important within the context of the conversation with Noel. Wallis’s “Oh, please” and “Oh, no you don’t” continues the confrontation of gender expectation with a tone of exasperation, disapproval, and indicates her goal of recomposing her self-representation outside of such restrictive options.

Having ruptured Noel’s representation of her and eschewed gender expectations she is still told “There’s nothing you can do here, Wallis” (Griffiths, “Duchess” 243). She remains firm, “Oh, there’s something I can do. I can wake them up” (Griffiths, “Duchess” 243). This notion of Wallis’s desire to escape the “little grave” becomes her motivation for summoning the Society Chorus. “*Raising her arms*” Wallis theatrically “call[s] the society ghosties, the faeries in hiding, the goblins of my time, to speak!” (Griffiths, “Duchess” 244). Wallis takes control and demands that those who “tried to destroy” her are now in her power (Griffiths, “Duchess” 244). “*Suddenly*” the Prince also begins recounting, “Once upon a time there was a Prince, a Faerie Prince” but Wallis has already established she will no longer allow anyone to take over her story, “Not yet” she tells him (Griffiths, “Duchess” 245).

Most of all, Wallis arrives to direct her self-representation. Noel remains as narrator, “Perhaps we should explain to the bidders that references to ‘Faerie’ have nothing to do with vulgar allusions to homosexuals. Faerie is a place, also a state of mind—ancient, deadly, enticing, sexual” (Griffiths, “Duchess” 244–45). Wallis allows him to continue until she interrupts, “Enough. I’m Faerie Queen now. It’s time to remember, even if remembering makes you feel alive in places you wish were dead. I command you to remember” (Griffiths, “Duchess” 245). By using this term Griffiths invokes narrative and memory, which are, as Sherrill Grace establishes, “two basic tools that are also deep-seated needs” which structure and inform “all AutoBiography” (Grace, “An Introduction” 17).

In *The Duchess a.k.a. Wallis Simpson* Griffiths creates a frame for the performance that rests upon this transformation of real life into auto/biographical performance. Griffiths embraces the illusory nature of theatre by establishing this fantasy realm where historical truth is “open to interpretation” by all involved (Griffiths, “Thief” 305). Having dismantled these expectations surrounding the representation of women Wallis creates a performance that “is her final chance” as Cynthia Zimmerman argues, and “she summons the Faeries to begin the flashback and show the world her truth” (“Introducing Wallis” iv). Griffiths superimposes fact and fantasy to propose the magically powerful reality that being ambitious, stylish, and charismatic has history-altering potential. Wallis will recompose her past.

Taking on the language of the Prince's fairy-tale beginning Noel narrates, "Once upon a time there was a poor girl with oil-drilling eyes and a will of iron . . ." until Wallis chimes in, "An innocent young girl. . . . Whose husband drank and locked her in the bathroom and took her to China—" (Griffiths, "Duchess" 245). Her first act as Fairy Queen is to counter the oft-used "twice-divorced commoner" descriptor and underhanded insult to her character. Noel questions Wallis's narrative flow, telling her that "China's going to be a problem" because "it's just messy" (Griffiths, "Duchess" 245). Wallis is curt, "Do it" (Griffiths, "Duchess" 245). The audience will witness her messy life.

Her first husband, Win Spencer, proves himself to be a cruel, controlling dictator.¹²¹ He takes Wallis to "the best whorehouse in the world" (Griffiths, "Duchess" 246). Here he commands the three women, Shoko, Patti, and Maki, to "Teach her the works" telling them, "I don't want a wife, I want a whore" (Griffiths, "Duchess" 246). When they instead want to teach Wallis "about power, about knowledge" Win resists, insisting upon his desire for a wife who is a sexual object (Griffiths, "Duchess" 246). As the scene progresses sounds of a revolution are heard off-stage. When Wallis refuses her husband's desire to flee, he becomes enraged and the audience witnesses as "[h]e punches WALLIS brutally in the stomach. She doubles over . . . WIN staggers off" (Griffiths, "Duchess" 247). The stage directions specify, "*It is possible she sustains a very early miscarriage, it is possible she merely receives a blow to some much older*

¹²¹ Wallis and Win were married in 1916 and divorced in 1927.

wound. *Even she may not know the truth*” (Griffiths, “Duchess” 247). Of course, in performance this exact sentiment cannot be expressed. With Griffiths’s well-established and constantly lauded talent as an actor, and given her deep understanding of the audience, I suspect her embodiment of Wallis as she “*writhes on the pillows in pain*” was even more powerful in the moment than depicted in these harrowing stage directions. Regardless, this scene depicts Wallis’s truth and suggests the broader concept of historical truth is subjective.

Establishing sympathy for the central character and altering any simplified views of her previous marriages, this scene transforms into the three women “*imparting something more mysterious*” upon Wallis (Griffiths, “Duchess” 247). They teach her Fang Chung, “secret arts which were more than merely sexual. These are the skills which help her succeed in the Faerie world,” and she ends the scene repeating “Knowledge, Strength, Fun” (Zimmerman, “Introducing Wallis” ii; Griffiths, “Duchess” 248). As she learns this mantra Wallis “*rises, as if created anew*” (Griffiths, “Duchess” 248). Having declared herself Faerie Queen and in doing so gained agency to depict her escape from an oppressive, abusive marriage, Wallis finally transforms from an elderly woman into “[a] *schoolmarm costumed by Dior*” who wears “*a chic, severe dress*” (Griffiths, “Duchess” 248).¹²²

¹²² It is Griffiths posing as this confident, charismatic Wallis that adorns the cover of *Linda Griffiths*, the collection of essays edited by Jacqueline Petropoulos.

As Wallis meets her second husband and lives an unsatisfying domestic life the women's prediction remains with her. She knits while sitting with her second husband. The audience sees the same actor who stormed off as Win now portraying Ernest Simpson.¹²³ In this new marriage she is "restless" and says "I can't believe this is what they meant," referring to her fortune (Griffiths, "Duchess" 250). Indeed, Wallis has been told, "One day you will be in a position of great power. . . . But your power will come because of a man. This will be very hard, you will want it for yourself" (Griffiths, "Duchess" 248). She has ambition and the charisma to match. She cannot "come and sit down quietly" as Ernest instructs (Griffiths, "Duchess" 251). Instead, Wallis says "I'm a panther. I want to climb up these walls, crawl out the window, leap into the street, and run forever" (Griffiths, "Duchess" 251). At this moment a silent interaction occurs, "*It is as if WALLIS is a magnet that pulls EDWARD, Prince of Wales into her story. As WALLIS leaves the apartment, she and EDWARD share a look of recognition. Both are remembering*" (Griffiths, "Duchess" 251).

As existing scholarship on *The Duchess, a.k.a. Wallis Simpson* has established, Griffiths's retelling of this famous story is complex and multidimensional. In the frame and these scenes depicting her early life Wallis provides for the audience her perspective. As she creates, directs, and reforms her representation Wallis refuses to be objectified, commodified, vilified. And she will not be forgotten. With this magical magnetism drawing Edward and Wallis together Griffiths refuses any expectation of having to

¹²³ Wallis and Ernest were married in 1928 and divorced in 1937.

comment on the political reality of this historical moment or providing the spectators with knowledge about the meaning of their love. Rather than continuing this impossible search for truth, this play will build from accusations that she “bewitched” Edward (Zimmerman, “Introducing Wallis” ii). Bennett establishes in her study of Griffiths’s biographically inclined plays, “The ability of history to flatten out the contradictions, complexities, and messiness of human lives and to organize everything into seamless, coherent narratives is both powerful and pervasive” (Bennett, “Performing Lives” 25). Hence, Grace notes that in Griffiths’s play “we see Wallis Simpson from different perspectives that complicate our picture of her” (Grace, “Wallis” 69). The audience witnesses Wallis struggling through both the oppressive nature of her relationship to all these men, Win, Ernest, and Noel. She expresses her truth instead of accepting what has been written in history books, in the media, and in biographies.

I have spent significant time establishing how the early moments of the play build a complex self-representation for Wallis. Susan Bennett and Sherrill Grace each gives the historical and biographical elements of the play extensive attention. Cynthia Zimmerman also provides a nuanced understanding of this “multi-levelled play” that creates Wallis’s world (Zimmerman, “Introducing Wallis” i). This comprehensive examination here of how Griffiths embodies and creates Wallis specifically aligns with their analysis of the play. Having traced Griffiths’s process we discover this Wallis in *The Duchess* has nothing to do with love or beauty. However, as the play progresses, she enters a world where these traits are still valued, along with tradition.

The most illustrative example of the play's historical roots and how they function in this kaleidoscopic world is the moment when Edward abdicates the throne. Griffiths has her Edward speak from Edward VIII's Abdication Address given on Dec 11, 1936. Each line in the play comes directly from the original, but Griffiths distills what in real-life was a lengthy address into a few sentences. She therefore relies upon the historically accurate text while arranging it for her purposes. The pieces she does choose to include indicate the emphases of the play.

First, Griffiths begins the speech not with the original opening, "At long last I am able to say a few words of my own" (Smith 338). This omission emphasizes Wallis's desire to control her self-representation. With this focus of the play, Wallis's desperation to tell her truth is not overlapped by this moment of Edward's feelings of being silenced. Instead, Griffiths has Edward start with a factual line, "A few hours ago I discharged my last duty as King and Emperor," and quickly moving into Edward's predicament of wanting to fulfil his duty yet finding the task "impossible . . . without the help and support of the woman I love" (Griffiths, "Duchess" 287). Interestingly, Griffiths reduces this sentence from a whole with which Edward begins and ends with his agonizingly opposed motivations.¹²⁴ Once again, an analysis of how Griffiths adjusts Edward VIII's

¹²⁴ The line reads "But you must believe me when I tell you that I have found it impossible to carry the heavy burden of responsibility and to discharge my duties as King, as I would wish to do, without the help and support of the woman I love, and I want you to know that the decision I have made has been mine, and mine alone" (Smith 338).

speech suggests her Wallis refuses to let the focus of the abdication be on anyone but herself.

In fact, from the moment of George V's death to this abdication Wallis depicts herself as in control. Edward's first act as King Edward VIII, while the other characters kneel before him, is "[i]n tears" to call for her, "It's started. Wallis! Help me" (Griffiths, "Duchess" 275). The dramatic action crescendos to the address, but Griffiths does not create a dramatic arc to the abdication by focusing on the royal family, but by imagining negotiation between Wallis and the Archbishop. Edward specifies, "the decision I have made has been mine, and mine alone" (Smith 338). Griffiths removes this line. Instead, just before this moment in the play Edward remains offstage, in an imaginative sense writing and preparing the speech, while the audience watches a cunning Wallis onstage. She asks the Archbishop, "There must be something you can say, or do. Please" (Griffiths, "Duchess" 286). Victory is in sight, "There is something" he tells her, "If I were crowning a Queen, we would draw apart to a special tent near Westminster Abbey, and I would take a sacred oil and anoint your breasts. This would signify a maternal joining with the land" (287). Wallis "*opens her blouse*" and as music peaks the Archbishop "*leans over her, oil in his hands,*" but Edward enters. Wallis uses her ambition and alluring charm to nearly be anointed. Foiled she "*falls to the ground. Sobs are torn from her body*" as Edward comes to the microphone and speaks (287).

Wallis does not speak, but her emotional reaction juxtaposes the historically accurate abdication speech. The Archbishop's references to the "maternal joining with

the lands” becomes much more poignant with the true words of Edward VIII that Griffiths has her Edward speak, “My brother has one matchless blessing, enjoyed by so many of you and not bestowed on me—a happy home with his wife and children” (287). In the historical speech this fragment comes amongst the celebration of his brother’s “fine qualities” (Smith 339). With Griffiths’s masterful arrangement it becomes an issue of infertility. We earlier witness Win’s brutal assault upon his wife and we are privy to the physical effects it has left on Wallis.

The falling action of the play is commenced by Wallis’s descent to her knees. In the next scene “*WALLIS is stripped of her jewels*” moments before receiving a wedding veil from Edward. Upon exchanging rings “*they are cursed*” and with “*crashes of thunder . . . are thrown out of the Kingdom*” (Griffiths, “Duchess” 288). Wallis’s belief in the unsettling of assumptions along with her desire to replace concepts of propriety, and prestige collapses.

Wallis thinks she has dismantled these concepts, “Nobility is dumb” she tells Edward once they have entered “the real world” (288). But even in her self-representation Wallis cannot make herself as powerful or enduring as she hoped. In the next scene Wallis’s narrator no longer remains under her control as he now serves the royal family. Lady Elizabeth tells him, “Do you know what they’re singing in the streets? ‘Hark the Herald Angels Sing, Wallis Simpson’s nicked our King’” (289). After Wallis and Edward meet with Hitler, Lady Elizabeth speaks as we hear “*sounds of bombs, tanks, planes, and screaming*” (294). She concretizes her ascent over Wallis, “This is no time for style, this

is a moment for real courage” and concludes, “My Elizabeth will reign, and as I roll up her little ringlets, I teach her how to rule with a love of tradition that will make her invulnerable. Wallis is barren. The Windsors will never threaten this dynasty with their cheap flash” (294). Despite her ambitious climbing Wallis ingratiates herself with the people.

Tradition may have been victorious in the real world, but the final moments of *The Duchess* close the frame in a performatively powerful way. Noel tells Wallis “It’s time to begin the auction again. . . . You can’t stop me this time” (300). Wallis concludes with a final desperate speech “oh, God, don’t leave me with this inside, don’t let me die this way. I love him” (300). In Wallis’s bereaved state she addresses the “laughing” faerie folk, “I am the twentieth century, when love was too late and betrayals rang wide and there was no pity. I am the twentieth century, but I loved him” (300). Having spoken these final words she concedes, “Take my jewels, maestro, sell them high, make a bidding war to end all bidding wars. I am going to dance” (300).

Wallis dances to music that recalls her first encounter with Edward. Yet, the stage directions specify, “*Still straddling EDWARD’s body, WALLIS dances like a very old puppet*” (300). There are three strains of importance to this ending. Firstly, she’s on top. Symbolic rather than sexual, Griffiths has Wallis remain above Edward to signify the power dynamic which has been developed throughout, she is the dominant partner in their relationship. Second, that she is a puppet represents how historical reality has been written, Wallis has done what she could in the fictional world of performance but

redemption for her is impossible since the story's end, if it remains true to history, cannot be altered or revised. Under the control of the royal family, she is unable to gain true autonomy. We have witnessed, however, how women's lives, choices, and narratives can be shaped and rewritten. Despite being unable to change history, Wallis can magically recompose her self-representation, even if just for the moment of performance.

The final significance to this conclusion comes from a connection with the audience interludes that punctuate the first act. In the fourth scene of the play the stage directions specify "*WALLIS and the audience. WALLIS turns to the audience*" (250). Griffiths as Wallis proposes how this story may apply to them, "All that power and no place to put it. Sound familiar?" (250). Perhaps tradition defeats her, but she shows us the potential for change. Having proposed this question, Wallis returns to the concept of performativity in the eighth scene when she once again "*turns to the audience*" (258). She addresses "a nasty rumour going around that [she] was a man" and confesses, "Oh, I wish. It's true that every once in a while I would take the cardboard tube from a roll of toilet paper and tape it between my legs so it . . . dangled" (258). Wallis suggests the only option for her to achieve power is to look beyond her sex. *The Duchess* therefore contains feminist questions of identity, agency, and autonomy underlying Wallis's experiences, her choices, and her creation of this Faerie kingdom.

At the end of the first act, when King George V dies, Wallis gains the chance to speak from a place of power. She tells the audience, "I want you to feel as I do now. Triumphant. Mighty" (276). Negated by the conclusion, this moment nonetheless

provides the audience with a vision of a woman with great capability. We see the best version of Wallis, even if it is fleeting and not historically accurate. Speaking of *Paper Wheat*, Layne Coleman says that “to see Linda’s work in that show was to love what humans could be . . . what they could accomplish together. It was an esteem raiser. All her work became like this” (Coleman, *Linda Reviewed*). Griffiths’s poignant ending of the auction, with Wallis remaining visually on top, suggests the power to imagine and enact such a reversal of how women have been historically perceived. Griffiths imagines this Faerie realm with power for all, doing so for both her subject and for her audience. Griffiths takes these core resonances from *The Duchess a.k.a. Wallis Simpson* and transforms them once again to create Gwendolyn MacEwen in an autobiographical solo performance.

3.2 Alien Creature: A Visitation from Gwendolyn MacEwen

“In the darkness of a space in limbo, the shadow of a woman appears. It is as if she has been called up from some other dimension. Gradually she begins to appear more tangible” (Griffiths, *Alien* 13). Gwendolyn MacEwen materializes before us in a liminal space between death and life, between an apparition and the body of actor-playwright Linda Griffiths. MacEwen was known for her poetry, prose, and work for the stage. She began writing poetry as early as ten when she assuredly preserved the pencil with which she crafted her first piece (Sullivan 37). MacEwen is “considered by some to be Canada’s

finest post-Second World War poet” (Rattan and Shoesmith). She won two Governor General’s Awards for her poetry, wrote and published over twenty books, and was the writer-in-residence at both the University of Western Ontario and the University of Toronto. In *Shadow Maker: The Life of Gwendolyn MacEwen*, biographer Rosemary Sullivan chronicles MacEwen’s untimely and tragic passing in 1987 by asking, “Had Gwendolyn, once again, been reaching for life?” (Sullivan 384).

Linda Griffiths’s solo performance as Gwendolyn MacEwen is not a documentary piece or a biography. It contains details about her life and work as well as imaginary scenes about Wonder Woman and an invented company called Poetry International. This play premieres on November 11, 1999, produced by Theatre Passe Muraille in association with Duchess Productions. Simon Heath directs, and Jan Komarek does “Lighting and Environment Design” (Griffiths, *Alien* 11).¹²⁵ Performing in the intimate Backspace, Griffiths as Gwendolyn invites the audience “into [her] place. Mind and heart” (Griffiths, *Alien* 15). As she transforms into a more perceptible figure, this woman “walks forward towards the audience as the light around her brightens. She stands for a long time before speaking, looking at the audience, as if drinking them in” (Griffiths, *Alien* 13). Upon becoming tangible, Gwendolyn approaches the audience as if intimately absorbing them. It is as if MacEwen magically returns to enact this reaching out, the audience witnessing and experiencing her ephemeral visitation.

¹²⁵ *Alien Creature: A Visitation from Gwendolyn MacEwen* receives a remount in the following season, running from the 6th to 25th of February in 2001 (Julien et al. 241).

This play does not only retell, re-vision, or any such verb that suggests the act of reiteration.¹²⁶ *Alien Creature: A Visitation from Gwendolyn MacEwen* is an artist's theatrical biography. In each performance Griffiths enacts MacEwen's various selves. Scholars have studied the text and elements of the performance with a focus on dialogue monologue (Bennett), improvisational creation (McLeod), and intertextuality between MacEwen and Griffiths (Wood). Even more, Griffiths foundationally interacts with and performs Rosemary Sullivan's biography of MacEwen, *Shadow Maker*. With this text, which heavily relies on MacEwen's collection and Griffiths's own archives, these artists's selves intertwine to magically perform the tangible importance of art. The potentiality of art to create beyond its material existence becomes a core component of Gwendolyn's monologue as she performs magic tricks. In each performance Griffiths enacts Gwendolyn MacEwen's varying selves created by her biography and by her art to reify the poet as well as to perform the essence of her own artistic practice.

As the initial stage directions suggest, the performance that has just begun occurs in an unstated time and space. Griffiths as MacEwen begins to appear more tangible, but in the original production in the backspace of Theatre Passe Muraille, the stage was

¹²⁶ In her introduction to *Performance and Cultural Politics* Elin Diamond engages with "the terminology of 're' in discussions of performance, as in *reembody*, *reinscribe*, *reconfigure*, *resignify*. 'Re' acknowledges the pre-existing discursive field, the repetition—and the desire to repeat—within performative present, while 'embody', 'configure', 'inscribe', 'signify', assert the possibility of materializing something that exceeds our knowledge, that alters the shape of sites and imagines other as yet unsuspected modes of being" (Diamond, "Performance and Cultural Politics" 67). Of course, Griffiths retells MacEwen's life story. She also goes beyond this repetition to make Gwendolyn appear concrete in performance, the initial stage directions suggesting she becomes solid, if only for the moment.

backlit with lights covered with paper, maintaining a phantasmal aura around her (Coleman, *Interview with Layne Coleman, December 2020*). Indeed, Sherrill Grace recalls watching a fragment of this piece performed at a workshop at the University of British Columbia in 2004, “For a few electrifying moments Linda Griffiths recreated *her* Gwendolyn MacEwen for us, and those moments transformed a sun-filled meeting room into the dark, tormented, and haunted space of an artist’s mind” (Grace, “An Introduction” 19). In her piece, which compares *Alien Creature* to Wendy Lill’s *The Occupation of Heather Rose*, Katherine McLeod describes this same performance, “the magic woven by Griffiths . . . surpassed any description, even stage directions written by the playwright herself” (91). The power of this play in the moment of performance proves to be the epitome of the ephemeral nature of theatre.

A number of scholarly pieces on the broader subject of auto/biography in the theatre make mention of Griffiths’s performance of MacEwen. Each one addresses a note found in the programme and precedes the published script. Griffiths writes, “I want to address this to the people who knew and loved her and tried to help. I want to say, ‘This may not be your Gwen, or you may find glimpses of her when you least expect it. Then there might be times when you think, “she would never say that”’. The person that is present that you don’t know is me. She and I are doing this play. And only both of us can speak” (Griffiths, *Alien* 8). Cynthia Zimmerman explicates the effect created by this foundational understanding of the play’s relationship to biography,

As Griffiths's comment indicates, the playwright is reconstructing a life, not documenting one. In doing so, she is bringing to the fore certain material, finding (even imposing) patterns, deliberately selecting, omitting, and highlighting. The play is 'inspired by the life and works of [the artist],' to use Griffiths's phrase, not totally determined by that life or those works. The imagination of the playwright will travel beyond what is verifiable.

(Zimmerman 110)¹²⁷¹²⁸

Likewise, in her introduction to *Performing Autobiography: Contemporary Canadian Drama* Jenn Stephenson considers this interplay between playwright and subject by arguing that "Linda Griffiths in her 1999 solo performance . . . also makes use of the metacritical perspective of double-voicing to explore similar issues [to those in her study], linking the artistic aspirations of MacEwen to her own, while at the same time creating space in which to question her presumption to MacEwen's life story," although it does not enter into her larger project (Stephenson, *Performing Autobiography: Contemporary Canadian Drama* 9).

Sherrill Grace also references this play in "Performing the Auto/Biographical Pact: Towards a Theory of Identity in Performance," noting *Alien Creature* as a "single-

¹²⁷ It should be noted that Zimmerman touches on the beginning of Griffiths's "Playwright's Notes" as well as the end.

¹²⁸ A note to my committee, "Portraits of the Artist: Plays by Canadian Women" serves as the introduction to *Theatre Research in Canada* Spring and Fall 2004, volume 25, numbers 1 and 2. I will rectify this, but right now I do not have access to the hard copy of this piece and cannot find an electronic version with pagination.

character play, written and performed by the same person” which presents “new possibilities” to her strategy of reading auto/biographical work (Grace, “Towards a Theory” 72). Grace here defines performative autobiographics as “the practice of creating a life story in a script and on stage that *becomes* a version of that life, whether the story is autobiography, biography, or, as I think may often happen, a hybrid: auto/biography” (Grace, “Towards a Theory” 67). In this initial iteration of her theory Grace writes, “In performance, *Alien Creature*, gives us *both* Linda Griffiths and Gwendolyn MacEwen; Griffiths stresses this point in her ‘Playwright’s Notes’” (Grace, “Towards a Theory” 72). Citing this same comment that draws so much critical attention Grace concludes, “To some degree then, Griffiths is performing herself as she creates Gwen and Gwen’s biography in the first-person voice and pronoun of the autobiographer” (Grace, “Towards a Theory” 72). Finally, Bennett in her comparison of *Maggie & Pierre*, *The Duchess*, and *Alien Creature* argues that the latter is “the most obviously dialogic monologue (to recall Ric Knowles’ term) of Griffiths’s biographical performances, this play asks: what does destabilization do for the writer/actor who must embody dialogism in all its complexities?” (Bennett, “Performing Lives” 34). Ultimately, she concludes that Griffiths indicates “[t]he performer . . . will not get to the ‘authentic’ person represented by *becoming* that individual (the precept of Method acting), but will better serve the real life subject of the play by putting into dialogue a range of representational strategies (textual, physical, improvisational, among them)” (Bennett, “Performing Lives” 34).

Two scholarly book chapters consider Griffiths's strategies of intermingling herself with MacEwen. In "The Tragic Magic Show of *Alien Creature: A Visitation from Gwendolyn MacEwen*" Brent Wood analyzes MacEwen's work alongside Griffiths's play.¹²⁹ Katherine McLeod's piece introduces the term "performative mirror talk," "a method of auto/biographic representation that foregrounds its own *process* of making—particularly through its attentiveness to the voice as enabling linguistic reflections, or rather linguistic reiterations—of a *self* in flux" (McLeod 89). She develops this concept in order to prove that the two plays she chooses to compare "involve a female character whose story is not so much about reflecting her life in a narrative as it is about engaging with the improvisatory and performative processes that perform her life on stage" (McLeod 89).

Through this relatively robust body of scholarship surrounding *Alien Creature*, clearly this play's nuanced and complex intermingling of various representational strategies in performance creates the self of both MacEwen and Griffiths. Indeed, Griffiths writes on an undated page of a likewise untitled notebook thoughts about this play-in-progress. The first reads, "what if it isn't a monologue to the audience, but a dialogue between me and Gwendolyn." As I indicate with Grace's and McLeod's description of her experience watching Griffiths as MacEwen, the ineffability of how the

¹²⁹ Wood has written separately about each writer elsewhere, see "No-Man's Land: Mythic Crisis in Gwendolyn MacEwen's *The T.E. Lawrence Poems*" in *Studies in Canadian Literature* (2004) and his book review of *Alien Creature* in *Canadian Theatre Review* (Summer 2020) (Wood, "Mythic Crisis"; Wood, "Alien Creature [Book Review]").

actor-playwright creates the poet in performance contributes to the magical nature of the play. However, Griffiths's address to MacEwen's loved ones is not the only remark to preface the performance.

Her "Playwrights Notes" conclude with this comment on the product of the play and begin with a reflection on her founding insights, "This play is inspired by the life and work of Gwendolyn MacEwen. But there has been double inspiration, first from MacEwen herself, and then from the extraordinary biography of her life by Rosemary Sullivan, *Shadowmaker* [sic]" (Griffiths, *Alien* 8).¹³⁰ Griffiths's process customarily involves extensive research into her subject. The programme, script, as well as archival documents in the Linda Griffiths *fonds* indicate her familiarity with MacEwen's work by their constant references to and citations of both volumes of her collected poetry and some of her prose.¹³¹ Griffiths has also interviewed members of MacEwen's inner circle, thanking a number of individuals for speaking with her, including her biographer (Griffiths, *Alien* 9).¹³² The opening of *Alien Creature* intertwines these three women.

Sullivan's introductory chapter begins with her experience at one of MacEwen's readings just months before her passing. She recalls, "As she [MacEwen] walked out

¹³⁰ Once again Griffiths's first interaction with Gwendolyn MacEwen is as an actor. She performs as the voice of MacEwen in a biographical film about the poet (*Longfellow*).

¹³¹ For example, a document titled "Jam sessions with Simon. Feb. 4, 1999" appears to be loose pages transcribed from Griffiths's improvisations into this character. Even at this early stage, Griffiths uses MacEwen's work, and its inclusion in this document suggests she has already memorized some of her poetry (Griffiths, *Jam Sessions* 37).

¹³² Specifically, Griffiths thanks two sets of people that includes "M.T. Kelly, Penn Kemp, David Young, Jim Polk, Paul Thompson, Anne Anglin, Nikos Tsingos, Adrienne Clarkson" and special thanks to a number of additional individuals, including Carol Wilson (MacEwen's sister) and Margaret Atwood (MacEwen's friend) (Griffiths, *Alien* 9).

under that proscenium, her transformation into a figure of courage and authority became a magic act” (Sullivan x). This moment of performance that Sullivan uses to depict her biographical subject is contradicted by what she witnessed behind the stage as co-host of the event. Before this magical transformation Gwendolyn was “pacing nervously backstage” because “[f]or her, performing was always traumatic, and she had been sick in the washroom” (Sullivan ix). Griffiths then transforms this memory into the early moments of *Alien Creature*.

The audience watches as “*GWENDOLYN turns to leave but sees there is no way out. The only open space is the audience. She turns again to them, fighting the desire to be sick all over everything*” (Griffiths, *Alien* 13). Once “[t]he feeling passes” Gwendolyn explains herself, “When I used to do poetry readings, backstage I would be vomiting and retching up whole globs of entrails and blood. . . . A small Canadian wren shaking with fear. And then I would come onstage, and something would happen. I would become taller and broader and wiser. More beautiful, more powerful, more . . . pure” (Griffiths, *Alien* 14). In *Shadow Maker* Sullivan recollects her memory which serves to create the biographical subject and to build an authentic voice as biographer by sharing with the reader her intimate knowledge of the poet. In performance, the same moment is presented through the writer, Griffiths. Yet, because she also embodies Gwendolyn who speaks directly to the audience it transforms once again and becomes the poet’s self-representation.

Gwendolyn baldly speaks her self into being by specifying her desire for the audience to behold her in a certain way.¹³³ She says, “I want you to know I was brave. I want you to know I fought hard. I want you to know I loved beauty, that I laughed. I want to you to know I was a coward. I wish...I wish” before inviting the audience into her space (Griffiths, *Alien* 15). This transition leaves the yearning undeclared, but the action of inviting the audience into the fictional world of her intimate space initiates the expression of her hope. We are also made aware that this performance is temporally limited. MacEwen indicates that she has risen to die again, “I feel I have to warn you that I do die in the end” (Griffiths, *Alien* 13). Exposing the ending allows Gwendolyn to narrate her death herself, “But I did not commit suicide. I drank myself to death, it’s different. Don’t Sylvia Plath me and I won’t Sylvia Plath you” (Griffiths, *Alien* 13). As Bennett remarks, “the audience is left not to wonder about the outcome, but to focus on the words and on the magic Griffiths uses to conjure up the various selves that construct MacEwen’s tortured life” (Bennett, “Performing Lives” 33). Indeed, her life had many traumatic and tragic moments, which Sullivan’s biography reveals. By not providing such specific biographical detail the Gwendolyn created by Griffiths emphasizes MacEwen as an artist.

MacEwen worked tirelessly as a poet but lived many periods of her life in poverty. In *Alien Creature* she plays with the possibility of instead “taking up a career in

¹³³ Throughout this section I purposefully use “her self” in order to denote the being created through self-representation in the moment of performance, rather than the pronoun “herself” with its reflexive connotations referring back to the existing self.

sales” (Griffiths, *Alien* 17). “And why not?” she asks, “I watched this city get sold. I hated this city because it was unmagical, it tried to kill the surreal” (Griffiths, *Alien* 17). Sullivan writes, “Gwen also hated what was happening in Toronto in the eighties, the decade of greed” (Sullivan 361). “The sixties had seemed to provide some space for the artist” yet by “the mid-eighties many of the artists and second-hand book dealers were fleeing to small towns, where one might still live an existence driven by art rather than money” (Sullivan 361). Gwendolyn touches on this change in support for artists baldly, “I don’t want to be poor. . . . Just because I’m a poet doesn’t mean I don’t like light coming through the window like anyone else. . . . Did they suddenly put a circle around and we were on the outside?” (Griffiths, *Alien* 18). This image of a circle will return but shifts to critiquing the gentrification that has occurred in Toronto.

Interestingly, just moments before this confession about struggling with poverty Gwendolyn speaks about a home. MacEwen never owned property, yet Gwendolyn curiously says, “all of a sudden the house I was living in was worth double what it was worth the previous month and then triple what it was worth the previous four months . . . and then ten times what it was worth and the ground I was walking on was suddenly worth more than gold” (Griffiths, *Alien* 18). Alongside Gwendolyn’s experience is Griffiths’s purchase of a house from her earnings touring with *Maggie & Pierre* (Coleman, *Interview with Layne Coleman, December 2020*). As a fellow artist in this city

Griffiths speaks with Gwendolyn, two artists “who walked the same streets” (*5 Solo Shows*).¹³⁴

This sequence crescendos into Griffiths and MacEwen critiquing the lack of support Canadian artists receive. Gwendolyn exclaims, “The city will pay! The city will pay, the world will pay! For every poet forced underground, for every painter even if the paintings are stupid for every possibly, no probably pretentious artist forced to flee” (Griffiths, *Alien* 18). She also foresees “payment” in the future, predicting “all of us, all of you are paying!” (Griffiths, *Alien* 18). Griffiths in these moments performs Gwendolyn MacEwen’s life. By transforming Sullivan’s biography into Gwendolyn’s self-performance, the poet and actor-playwright fuse. Together in this illusory private space they speak against the unjust circumstances gentrification in Toronto has created for artists. These moments demonstrate Griffiths’s inspired use of Sullivan’s work. Griffiths has Gwendolyn perform her self-representation in each example but also embraces the similarities between herself and her subject.

Another central representation strategy of *Alien Creature* becomes apparent in this final line which inculcates the audience. Griffiths purposefully and meaningfully plays with the proximity of the spectators to the performance. In “I Am a Thief” Griffiths details her connection with MacEwen “was so strong” that she “took the chance the audience would feel it” (305). Archival traces similarly reveal MacEwen’s poem “Dark

¹³⁴ Griffiths expresses her reverence for MacEwen with Kathleen Gallagher, “she lived the life, you know. For me, Gwendolyn MacEwen was beyond inspiration, beyond ‘subject.’ She was truly the breath of the play” (Griffiths and Gallagher 130).

Pines Under Water” as another point of intersection between these two artists and emphasizes the importance of performing their created selves for an audience. Griffiths writes on a document entitled “What’s Left,” “there’s something down there and it needs to be heard” (What’s Left). With this note Griffiths transforms the final line of MacEwen’s poem, “There is something down there and you want it told” (MacEwen, “Dark Pines Under Water”). Therefore, as Griffiths discovers this method of creating MacEwen’s self oscillating with her self, the audience as witness becomes integral to their interaction.

A through line in *Shadow Maker* is the intensity MacEwen poured from her life into her poetry. Sullivan writes, “Fiction is not autobiography, and cannot be used as witness to testify against real life, but when we write we are transmuting or transforming the world as we *feel* it,” which aligns with Griffiths’s sentiments about creating *Alien Creature* for an audience (Sullivan 45). The intermingling of Griffiths’s and MacEwen’s artistic selves enacts the pursuit of art driven and created by personal experiences. Sullivan recalls, for example, that one of MacEwen’s partners, Salah, “reminded [her] that there was no boundary for Gwen between myth and reality. ‘If, in a poem you think she is writing allegorically,’ he warned, ‘you would be wrong. For her it was all very real’” (Sullivan 203). For Griffiths, creating this piece, her artistic rendition of Gwendolyn, is also very real. In 2014 she explains, “It was me and it was her. And the two of us joined. And the whole idea of what is it to be an artist and what do you have to give up, or should you give up, and how much pain related to how much gain. And all of

that, and what it is to be a poet, which is as close to the cave and the initial speaking as anything” (5 *Solo Shows*). It is in this sense that I argue *Alien Creature* in performance reifies Gwendolyn MacEwen. Through the crosshatched art of these women, “something abstract” becomes “more concrete or real” in the moment of performance which specifically relies upon the audience’s presence (“Reify, v.”).

Griffiths builds the initial moments of the performance upon the relationship between the audience, herself, and her subject. As she begins her monologue Gwendolyn shows affection for each spectator, complimenting and poetically describing them, “You’re so beautiful. You look like great bunches of black grapes, you look like ‘renegade electrons searching for a core,’ you look like moon striped pieces of . . . sorry, it gets to be a habit” (Griffiths, *Alien* 13). She then acknowledges the reality of the shared moment, “You look like . . . people sitting in an audience. You’re very precious to me. You came” (Griffiths, *Alien* 14). The audience’s presence, their willingness to attend the theatre and witness her self-representation is necessary. Moreover, Griffiths creates this expression of gratitude for attending this piece of art through both MacEwen’s poem and her play.

The title of the play also connects this self-representation personally to each spectator. Gwendolyn speaks specifically about “alien creatures,” saying “There aren’t so many of us now, there used to be hundreds of thousands. . . . Something has thinned down the ranks of those magic women, alien creatures, some but not all dark haired with regular features and some great bead around their necks” (Griffiths, *Alien* 14). She

identifies the remaining alien creatures that she encounters “on the streets, disguised in smart outfits of all kinds, I want to go up to you and say, ‘I know and it’s all right, I won’t tell anyone’” (Griffiths, *Alien* 14). The empowered ability of Gwendolyn to remake her identity in this self-representation reverberates through the audience as she acknowledges the disguises audience members may wear in their everyday lives.

Gwendolyn believes the presence of these otherworldly creatures has been depleted, “They came with their calculators and merging endless mergers they got so powerful, but how were we dangerous?” (Griffiths, *Alien* 14). Jill Dolan similarly asks in her 1993 “Geographies of Learning: Theatre Studies, Performance, and the ‘Performative’”: “How dangerous and useful might theatre be if it showed, with gestic insistence, that we are not even like us, that we are not the self-same individuals theatre has reassured us we appear to be?” (435). Griffiths’s use of magic in performance plays with theatre as an illusory realm, suggesting that despite its artificiality this play can create meaning in the real world. The first comes right at this moment of connection with the audience when “[a]s *GWENDOLYN reaches towards the audience, a spark of flame erupts from her hands*” (Griffiths, *Alien* 14). Immediately apologizing the poet says “I didn’t mean to frighten you. Damn those creative sparks” (Griffiths, *Alien* 14). This magic is not randomly scattered in the performance, nor is it just for theatrics or the humourous relief. At various moments the magical element of the performance serves as a tangible depiction of the ineffable effect of art.

Three specific sections of *Alien Creature* contain sequences of interrelated magic tricks. The first comes at this moment when a flame represents the poet's "creative sparks" (Griffiths, *Alien* 14). Soon after, to establish the performance space, a trunk that has been sitting on the stage "*opens by itself*" when "*GWENDOLYN gestures over the top*" (Griffiths, *Alien* 15). Its contents become the set design, "*a red cloth trimmed with gold*" and "*an exotic pillow*" decorating the stage (Griffiths, *Alien* 15). The final magic trick of this sequence entails a bottle of vodka and a drinking glass. Gwendolyn says "I need a drink. Vodka, a woman's drink. Colourless, odourless, so it almost doesn't exist" (Griffiths, *Alien* 16). And yet, "*GWENDOLYN pours clear vodka into a glass. The glass turns purple*" (Griffiths, *Alien* 16). This magic proposes the potential for a woman to empower herself by magically denying such an identity of nonexistence. To counter such oppression the colourless liquid becomes the colour of royalty.

The following sequence of magic tricks connects directly to Gwendolyn's creation of her self as a writer. Initially she takes the cloth off the top of the trunk "*with a magician's flourish*" under which "*a square of paper appears, made of light*" (Griffiths, *Alien* 28). Griffiths kneels and performs writing while speaking rhyming poetry that begins "Whatever you do, don't write poetry" (Griffiths, *Alien* 28). With "*a pair of heavy steel manacles*" Gwendolyn "*walks into the audience . . . and asks one of them to lock her up*" (Griffiths, *Alien* 29).¹³⁵ This sequence leads into Gwendolyn speaking her own

¹³⁵ A similar magic trick is also present during the improvisational sessions in early 1999. At this stage of the process Griffiths puts on a straight jacket and asks an audience member

infamous line, “Poets are magicians without quick wrists” (Griffiths, *Alien* 30). In a chapter with this title, Sullivan discusses MacEwen’s *Julian the Magician* in which this line appears to illustrate MacEwen’s belief that “[p]oets were ‘magicians without quick wrists,’ their tools of magic the same. If the magician was working in visual parables, the poet worked in verbal parables” (Sullivan 84). Griffiths has Gwendolyn speak this line locked in the manacles. She declares, “no more poetry for this girl. I can feel myself becoming more tangible by the moment. They’d never let me into the fourth dimension like this. . . . I’ll go back to the bank manager as a real person in the real world” (Griffiths, *Alien* 30).

This moment evokes an encounter Sullivan writes about in *Shadow Maker*. Gwendolyn tells us, “I wrote a book. And it’s so good. Every poem. Not a clunker in it. Boom and boom and boom and deeper and darker and lighter and funnier” (Griffiths, *Alien* 25). “How much is that worth?” she asks at the bank upon applying for a loan (Griffiths, *Alien* 25). “To show him my yield potential, I marched home and brought my twenty books, plunked them on his desk and said, ‘I did these, how much is this worth?’ He looked at me with these quite lovely blue watery eyes and said, ‘nothing.’ The Truth. Truth” (Griffiths, *Alien* 25). Rather than citing this moment as an event leading to her

“Will you do this up?” (Griffiths, *Jam Sessions* 37). The manacles suggest she has been arrested, perhaps the audience representing an individual with power from the real world. The straight jacket, on the other hand, gains meaning from MacEwen’s lifelong and inherited interactions with psychiatric care.

tragic death Griffiths instead creates a moment that questions the value of art.¹³⁶ If art is nothing in the real world, does it matter? And why do artists create it?

Having attempted escape from the ineffable realm of artistic creation, as Gwendolyn “*stands in the middle of her audience and rattles her locks and chains,*” she is “*enraptured with the success of the maneuver*” until “[*t*]he manacles suddenly drop to the ground with a giant thump” (Griffiths, *Alien* 30). Again, through gesture rather than the written or spoken word, in performance this trick insists upon the magical powers of an artist. Together they go on to counter what may be perceived as truth, suggesting that in this world of performance an individual’s self is multiple, moving, and malleable.

Together these artists demonstrate that art provides a powerful potentiality for self-revisioning and can impact the self of an attuned spectator. Soon after her manacles fall to the floor, Griffiths as Gwendolyn performs a theatre-poem, which serves as transition, about MacEwen’s upbringing: “Her mother was mad / and her father drank. / so sad. / Her mother was bad / and her father...blank” (Griffiths, *Alien* 31). The following lines recount a particularly traumatic moment in MacEwen’s life when, at the age of sixteen, protection that her father and her sister had been providing surrounding her mother’s illness was thwarted, “A madwoman’s cutting / A vein in her throat, / And her

¹³⁶ Sullivan writes that “when [Gwendolyn] went to her bank, she found her request for a loan had been refused. Ruben remembered her coming home in a fury, collecting all her books, and marching back to the bank. She banged the twenty books down on the counter and said: ‘Here! I did these. I just want to get my money.’ In her small blue bankbook, the last withdrawal is dated September 11th” (Sullivan 378). MacEwen dies less than three months later on November 30th.

daughter won't even cry" (Griffiths, *Alien* 31). Yet, instead of explaining or providing intimate details of the night, Griffiths enters into a section about personally driven art.

"Poets love the dark. But what does that mean? What's your dark?" inquires Gwendolyn (Griffiths, *Alien* 31). Scrutinizing this concept of the darkness any individual in the theatre may be carrying with them she continues, "Is it lurid bodies being eaten by worms? Electrons like mad bees circling your head?" (Griffiths, *Alien* 31). She begins with these fantastical, artistically rendered fears but they become darker and very realistic as she continues, "Is it germ warfare? Going blind? Waking up paralyzed? Excruciating pain? Your mother dying? Your child dying?" (Griffiths, *Alien* 31–32). With this barrage of questions Griffiths as Gwendolyn enacts the capability of art to confront and provoke these deepest fears of the audience. These questions touch on harrowing fears of bodily harm and the loss of a loved one. Repeating "Poets love the dark" Gwendolyn describes a moment of creative production growing from this place of personal darkness (Griffiths, *Alien* 32).

Griffiths depicts a moment of inspiration by intermingling her creative process with MacEwen's, proof of which comes from fellow artists in each woman's inner circle. Margaret Atwood, a long-time friend of Gwendolyn MacEwen, features throughout Sullivan's *Shadow Maker*. In her article "MacEwen's Muse" published in *Canadian Literature* in 1970 Atwood writes, "no-one has invoked the male Muse with such frequency and devotion as has Gwendolyn MacEwen" (Atwood 25). She considers the multiple pieces in which the figure of a muse appears, arguing "[t]he encounter between

muse and poet is an increasingly dominant theme in MacEwen's poetry" (Atwood 29).¹³⁷ In *Alien Creature* Gwendolyn describes such a presence as she creates, "[s]omeone is standing there, maybe it's a man, so like another man, and unlike, that you find yourself sinking down into some realization you don't want to have" (Griffiths, *Alien* 32). This moment depicts the apparition of a muse who guides Gwendolyn from her dark to the creation of a poem.

The space in which Gwendolyn describes herself creating holds great significance in understanding how seamlessly Griffiths intertwines her self with her subject. "Then there's a moment in a sunfilled kitchen" Gwendolyn begins, but abruptly comments, "I don't know why I say 'sunfilled' because I lived in so many basements" (Griffiths, *Alien* 32). The answer comes from an intimate knowledge of Griffiths's writing space, which Layne Coleman describes, "Her process was to sit at her table . . . and write while the sun shone through her west window" (Coleman, *Linda Griffiths - 2*). This beautiful depiction of an artist delving into the depths of artistic creation therefore combines MacEwen and Griffiths. An audience member without such an intimate knowledge of either artist would not know the significance of these details, but by speaking so truthfully this performance becomes self-authenticated. By creating each artist's self in this self-reflexive mode, in performance together they create self-authenticating art through their intertwining.

¹³⁷ Atwood is also co-editor, with Barry Callaghan, of both volumes of Gwendolyn MacEwen's posthumously published poetry collection (MacEwen, *Volume One: The Early Years*; MacEwen, *Volume Two: The Later Years*).

In *Alien Creature* these artists create art through the process of embracing uncomfortable feelings and sensations, “you find yourself sinking down into some realization you don’t want to have. About your life. About repetition” (Griffiths, *Alien* 32). Gwendolyn describes a physical sickness that arises and the continued desire to avoid such darkness. This natural aversion to discomfort contradicts the artist’s ability to explore the recesses of the mind, “And yet you allow yourself to sink right into your guts. Not for yourself but for the poem. And the poem may or may not be dark, but the moment is always dark. It’s always dark to go somewhere you don’t want to go” (Griffiths, *Alien* 32). She provides a tangible example of an acquaintance who has died by suicide which “of course” one would not imagine the details of “unless you’re moved to write a...” (Griffiths, *Alien* 32). The incomplete sentence once again does not overtly mingle Griffiths with MacEwen, but there remains a gap. The actor-playwright’s physical presence fills the silence.

As this fragment of the performance comes to a close it creates the essence of this performance. Gwendolyn addresses the audience directly,

I want to offer you my dark. Take my dark.

Please. Take my dark. A joke. ‘Together for one second we are light.’”

The apartment is flooded with blinding light” (Griffiths, *Alien* 33).

The act of creation leads to this transfer of the artist’s experience of darkness to the audience through the vehicle of her art. Wood discusses this line of poetry from MacEwen’s “Marino Marini’s Horses and Riders” that is “about sexual passion in which

lovers are figured as horse and rider who ‘collapse together in the catastrophe of love’” (Wood, “Tragic Magic Show” 46; MacEwen, “Marino Marini’s Horses and Riders” 142). Wood also notes Gwendolyn’s humour as she “mock[s] herself by hinting at the old Henny Youngman stand-up comedy line ‘take my wife...please’” (Wood, “Tragic Magic Show” 46). He builds his analysis by relying upon the interpretation of MacEwen’s poems. McLeod also considers this darkness motif, using it to demonstrate the haunting that occurs between these two artists, “this endless dialogue of haunting is, perhaps, *who* the play is *about*” (McLeod 93). These varying perspectives point to the multivalent quality of this text, each moment may be interpreted in many different ways. MacEwen arrives to speak to us, the meanings of her fragmented solo performance reverberate within each spectator’s perception.

My focus on Griffiths’s career leads me to consider the ephemeral moment of performance and the actor-playwright’s understanding of and connection with her audience. In the intimate Backspace of Theatre Passe Muraille, the lighting of the stage as suggested by the stage direction would illuminate the audience as well by proximity.¹³⁸ The imagined togetherness of these women with the audience transforms into a moment of unified illumination. The purpose of art is sharing one another’s dark because light is most bright in the darkness.

¹³⁸ Layne Coleman, who is also the Artistic Director of Theatre Passe Muraille at this time, confirmed in an interview that the lighting lit the seating area (Coleman, *Interview with Layne Coleman, December 2020*).

Another sequence of magic tricks begins at this moment of illumination. “*GWENDOLYN laughs, picks up a wand and starts blowing bubbles*” (Griffiths, *Alien* 33). Catching one of the bubbles, it “*has become suddenly solid in her hand*” (Griffiths, *Alien* 33). At this moment “[w]e hear the tinkle of broken glass,” but soon after Gwendolyn returns to her solidified bubble. She tells us “I reach into my mouth, down my throat, around my lungs, push aside my breastbone and pull it out” as “*GWENDOLYN reaches inside herself as if to pull out her living heart*” (Griffiths, *Alien* 35). The bubble reappears, unbroken. The final magic trick of this sequence returns to the metaphor of creative sparks with which the performance began. As the play moves towards its resolution the spark becomes “*two tongues of flame . . . burning in the palms of her hands*” as Griffiths quotes “Second Degree Burns,” ““We all have second degree burns / And they hurt but the hurt doesn’t matter / The living flame of the world is what matters”” (Griffiths, *Alien* 36). Through the bubble, which transmutes between states of matter, and the burgeoning flames, the play’s core about artistic creation comes to its peak. Both MacEwen and Griffiths dedicated her life to creating art, a path that took MacEwen through hardships and reductions of circumstances. It is the intermingling of their artistic products that creates this magical comment on the tangibility of art.

The image of a circular divide between prosperous Torontonians and othered artists or alien creatures returns in the most plainly biographical moment of the play. Griffiths does not provide specific details, but does return to Gwendolyn’s marriage, “Who was it that hadn’t had a bath in a long time? Oh right. My first husband. Shhhhh. I

wasn't going to talk about him. Not a word" (Griffiths, *Alien* 42). After a pause she does decide to speak about Milton Acorn. Their marriage spanned five months but haunted MacEwen, "he sent his scent after me till the day I died" (Griffiths, *Alien* 43). At this moment "*GWENDOLYN drops years again, now appearing nineteen, standing in a wide circle of golden light*" (Griffiths, *Alien* 43). In this late stage of her solo performance Gwendolyn provides an overview of her career from her early success, "I'm published in the States, and I am twenty. If there's no money, there will be money. If there's never any money, I'm just fine about that" (Griffiths, *Alien* 43). As she narrates her life she speaks a refrain, "the circle gets a little smaller" until she says "work is going well and I've written it all and there's two dollars in the bank and a green pepper for dinner and the circle is so small...until you're dancing on the head of a pin" (Griffiths, *Alien* 43, 44). Suggested by the disintegration of Gwen's speech, Griffiths takes the audience to the tragic ending, "I'm sorry, but I did warn you" (Griffiths, *Alien* 49).

Gwendolyn tidies the stage, preparing for the inevitable conclusion. The audience watches as "[*t*]he marrow of her bones seems to be shaking" but as she closes the chest "[*h*]er arms reach up to close the lid, the fingers white as light" (Griffiths, *Alien* 49). In this evocative moment of self-performance the audience witnesses MacEwen's struggle. Her hands becoming white recalls the light/dark motif created earlier and she reiterates her self-representation from the beginning of the play, "I want you to know I was brave . . . I want you to know I was a coward" (Griffiths, *Alien* 49). The unspecified "wish" is omitted as her description of the "something [that] would happen" transforms into stage

directions, “*GWENDOLYN stands and moves towards the audience, becoming taller and broader and wiser, more beautiful, more powerful, more...pure*” (Griffiths, *Alien* 15, 14, 50). The space becomes a poetry reading and Griffiths leaves the final text of the play to MacEwen herself.

Together, Griffiths’s performance and MacEwen’s perspicacious poetry create an infinitely vivid and powerful ending. The two poems Gwendolyn recites conclude the performance with powerful messages to the audience and to the artistic community. Both “The Lion” and “Past and Future Ghosts” are collected in MacEwen’s *Afterworlds*. Wood explains these two poems have been “carefully chosen to redeem painful mortality with the perspective of the infinite” (Wood, “Tragic Magic Show” 49).¹³⁹ Gwendolyn first recites “The Lion,” ““I swear by all the famous, ancient lions I have known / That the mighty children yet to come / will foster finer stars, / For they are the true lords, born of morning, / whose coming will call us down like a deck of cards”” (Griffiths, *Alien* 50). These women did indeed know many “famous, ancient lions,” this first line acknowledging each’s artistic community, those she collaborated with, and for whom she created. They were surrounded by, and were themselves, contributors to Canadian literature and Canadian culture. The following line addressing those “yet to come” pairs the recollecting first lines with a look into the future. Together Gwendolyn and Griffiths address those who will continue to build the community, developing art to “foster finer

¹³⁹ Analyzing the poems Wood proves “‘The Lion’ affirms the magical power of love” while in ‘Past and Future Ghosts’ “MacEwen posits that ghosts may haunt us from the future as well as the past” (Wood, “Tragic Magic Show” 49).

stars” (Griffiths, *Alien* 50). The final line seems to address the foundation of the play, Griffiths as belonging to the generation of artists following MacEwen who is able to “call us down” (Griffiths, *Alien* 50).

At this moment Gwendolyn begins to return to her ephemeral state. “*The lights begin to fade as GWENDOLYN smiles*” and says “I am starting to haunt you, I am starting right now” (Griffiths, *Alien* 50). McLeod argues, “The fact that Griffiths chooses to end her play with MacEwen’s own negation of an ending indicates that Griffiths intends to continue a haunted conversation between speaker and listener” (McLeod 93). Even more, with the through line of the tangibility of art and the magical staying power of creative product we watch as the biographical subject leaves the audience not with her tragic personal ending, but instead with Griffiths speaking MacEwen’s poetry to enact the infinite possibilities contained in her art.

The final stage direction of *Alien Creature* confirms the performance’s proliferating and immeasurable impact. “*As the lights go to black, an after-image of GWENDOLYN’s face hovers in the air*” (Griffiths, *Alien* 50). An afterimage is a type of visual illusion, “A sensory experience, especially a visual image, that persists after the stimulus has ceased” (Colman). With this final image *Alien Creature* enacts the performative potential of live theatre. Of course, the afterimage does not exist in the real world, but is nevertheless seen. Just like we logically know the flames Gwendolyn holds are a magic trick, they appear real in our field of vision. Grace asserts at the close of “Performing the Auto/biographical Pact” her belief that “performative auto/biographics

returns agency to the theatre by producing identities for all who sign the theatrical pact” (Grace, “Towards a Theory” 77). Such an effect cannot be quantified, but Griffiths here visually signifies the performance’s cognitive effect on the audience.

Analyzing this piece with the duality of real/fictional as a stagnant, concrete division or, with nonmagical thinking, misses the importance of imagination and of the live moment. Touching on these disguised alien creatures, Griffiths explains she “imagined that all these sort of sylph-like magic girls were all over the place, spewing poetry,” these women featuring in her creative vision (*5 Solo Shows*). She continues, “and it was also a belief that poetry was coming back. And while poets were to be looked down on because there’s so many of them and they never make any money . . . that the idea of poetry was for us and that it counted even though she died” (*5 Solo Shows*). In this sense the fictional elements of *Alien Creature* align with Jill Dolan’s proposition that “theatrical representation is a place of ‘perpetual reinvention,’ wired by the danger of performing against the rules. This is a space in which theatre practice—spectators and performers coming to a place to show and to look and to think through the danger together—regains its efficacy, and offers a site for working through some of these gender troubles that would be too dangerous, in different ways, on the street” (Dolan 435). Indeed, Griffiths suggests that even if the alien creatures return to their disguise, reifying Gwendolyn in the moment of performance has created a lasting effect.

Griffiths states at the end of “Process?” her earliest concept of *Alien Creature*: “The idea for the Gwendolyn MacEwen play is to immerse myself in her work and life,

make a loose map, then go out and improvise in fifteen-minute segments at events throughout the city for the next year. I've never worked quite so much without a net in front of audiences, but I believe this is the best way to get around the traps inherent in literary material. Hopefully, if I listen to Gwendolyn, she'll answer" (Griffiths, "Process?" 61). Griffiths adds to this understanding of her process in an interview with Kathleen Gallagher by saying, "I was definitely determined not to have anything in between me and the very core, so I set out to do something that I have actually never done, which was to try to work something out in front of an audience" (Griffiths and Gallagher 130). This product, created through her actor self, which explores the meaning of art, becomes what Griffiths describes as "the essence of what I believe in terms of what my life has been about. Almost. . . . It almost doesn't take energy to do *Alien Creature*" (Griffiths and Gallagher 121).

During the improvisational process Griffiths creates an imagined sequence about Wonder Woman, inspired by MacEwen's love for comic books (Sullivan 38). It begins with Gwendolyn acting "*as if being called away from the audience. But she has to go*" (Griffiths, *Alien* 22).¹⁴⁰ "It is the Eve of Destruction" and "the Amazons are watching, because she is the chosen one. Chosen to save the universe and all the gods" (Griffiths, *Alien* 22). Trapped in a cage, she descends into the core of the earth and "finds

¹⁴⁰ Wood and McLeod each perceptively write about this sequence in their respective articles. McLeod considers MacEwen's "Animal Spirits" alongside Griffiths's song (McLeod 97). Likewise, Wood links this "Wonder Woman-like adventure tale" with MacEwen's "Dark Pines Under Water" (Wood, "Tragic Magic Show" 38).

herself...in a nursery” (Griffiths, *Alien* 22–23). Here she encounters a repulsive, hairy, dirty creature that she discovers to be a child. To escape she must return to “[t]he cage of intellect,” but as

the creature and its poisons burrow deeper and deeper inside her, she . . . feels a warm blanket put over her, and a sweet song sung to her.

(*Singing*) You’re nothing but a nothing,

A nothing, a nothing.

You’re nothing but a nothing,

You’re not a thing at all.

Not a thing at all.... (Griffiths, *Alien* 23–24)

Wonder Woman defeats the creature and Gwendolyn returns. But just before coming back to the performance she narrates: “No one notices the shadow of a creature following behind her” (Griffiths, *Alien* 24).

This song reappears at the end of Gwendolyn’s life. She lacks inspiration, “there is no fire there is no breath there’s a weight and a shadow. There is nothing because you are nothing” at which time she sings again (Griffiths, *Alien* 46). While the sequence is inspired by MacEwen, this song comes directly from transcripts of Griffiths’s conversations with Maria Campbell that are edited into *The Book of Jessica*. On the fifth tape Griffiths divulges, “I also felt like...that I’d been given all these things, this supposed security and done nothing with it, or that I had given nothing. . . . That’s what the line is in that. You’re nothing but a nothing. You’re not a thing at all” (Campbell and

Griffiths, *Tape 5*). Griffiths, without noting it in any way, brings this section into *Alien Creature*. Considered with the seamless intertwining of herself with Gwendolyn, with the brilliantly adapted scenes from Sullivan's book, and with the citations of MacEwen's poetry, this moment truly reveals the power of Griffiths's creative process as actor-playwright.

Griffiths sinks into this uncomfortable sense of nothingness, performing it for herself, for MacEwen, and for her audience. This moment could be about *Jessica* or *The Darling Family*. It may be derived from MacEwen's dream about Wonder Woman, her traumatic childhood and the horrible truth of her mother's abuse. Or its creation may have grown from another archival trace of either of these artists upon which no one has stumbled. Likewise, the creature may be the artist's shadow self, perhaps Gwendolyn's inner child, or a vicious subconscious. In each possibility, there is intense psychological weight to this song that creates an empathic connection from Griffiths to Gwendolyn. Indeed, Griffiths's theatrical biographies exist firmly in an empowering yet fictional realm of performance where her kaleidoscopic creations can make meaning for all those present.

Chapter 4 Imagining Possibilities in Women's Representation

Type, damn you. Type! It's the way to liberty!
—Linda Griffiths, "Age of Arousal" 404

Nearing the end of her interview for Theatre Museum Canada's "Legend Library" Linda Griffiths tells interviewer Andrew Moodie what she learnt from each play he mentions. Her answers are as diverse as her plays in each's range of content, form, and the various creative processes she uses. To *Les maudits Anglais* she attributes "fashion," to *Jessica* "the dark side," *The Darling Family* "relationships," *A Game of Inches* "men," *Brother Andre's Heart* "Montreal, Catholicism," *The Duchess* "ambition," *Alien Creature* "myself as an artist," and to *Age of Arousal* "women" (*On Age of Arousal*). Moodie's inspiration for this question comes from Griffiths's opening statement in her autobiographical *The Last Dog of War*: "This isn't the story I set out to tell. That's the dilemma. I've always taken my dilemmas to the theatre—I really think it's the only place where I've ever learned anything" (Griffiths, *Last Dog* 3). A study of *The Last Dog of War* was my first foray into tracing Griffiths's process through her archival remnants, the final product published in *Linda Griffiths* (2018).

Five plays, the most varied of all other chapters, encompass this final phase of Griffiths's career (2005-2014). *Age of Arousal* (2007) is a written play in which Griffiths never performs. Conversely, *The Last Dog of War* (2009) is the first play to receive full

production in which Griffiths as solo performer walks on stage and performs as Linda. Along with *Games: Who Wants to Play?* (2014), these are the three plays from this time period that have been published. Griffiths also writes and performs in *Baby Finger* (2006) and *Heaven Above, Heaven Below* (2013). Each is incredibly personal, yet at the time of writing neither has been published and so I have decided not to include an in depth analysis of them.

While these plays all deserve attention, the focus of this chapter will be on *Age of Arousal*. Having discovered her own “ambition” with *The Duchess*, the empowerment to be “[her]self as an artist” in *Alien Creature*, with *Age of Arousal* she combines these elements and uses them as the leaping off points to develop her literary masterpiece, “all about women and one man,” as she inscribed in my copy of this play. In *Age of Arousal* Griffiths reveals the chaotic and complicated nature of women’s representation and of depicting women’s history. As Layne Coleman writes in the Foreword to *Age of Arousal*,

This is her finest wine, her deepest work, aged and honed and singing every breath along the path, every idea a challenge, an invitation to greatness. . . .

Linda has chosen the Victorian age as the ship that will carry her richest cargo, and she has chosen well. . . . But this is not a look back in time. This play is a cry to race towards the present. (“Foreword” 6)

Ostensibly about Victorian England, Griffiths sets *Age of Arousal* in 1885. Yet, within her device of *thoughtspeak* lies an indication of the work Griffiths aims to accomplish for her contemporary audience. Griffiths depicts the history of the suffrage movement

without any intent to represent historical truth. Instead, her attention remains on her women characters who reveal their lived experience and speak what has been previously repressed by societal and literary norms. At the same time, Griffiths concludes her historical essay which follows the playscript (in the 2007 publication of *Age of Arousal*) on the need to remember the suffrage movement:

Here were the contradictions, hypocrisies and bizarre scenarios of the sex war. I felt it was a good time to admit all the flaws of the struggle while still popping the champagne. We've memorialized war with 'Lest We Forget'. The struggle for women's emancipation continues in countless parallel universes. We must endow our differences with dignity and prestige. Lest we forget.

(Griffiths, "Flagrantly" 166)

4.1 *Age of Arousal*: Imagining and Reinventing the Representation of (Historical) Women

Linda Griffiths describes the "setting" of *Age of Arousal*,

London, 1885. A time of enormous political, emotional and sexual change. People are bursting their corsets with unbridled desire. There are half a million more women than men living in England. The women's suffrage movement is fueled by sheer numbers. Women demand rights. Those who protest are 'unsexed'. But the tide is too strong. Passions erupt and confusion reigns. . . .

(391)

Griffiths sets the scene by depicting the historical moment of the suffrage movement in England with its upheaval of current beliefs and ideologies. The environment into which these characters and the audience are thrust is at every turn complex, contradictory, and foreshadowing consequential changes. The six characters, five women and one man, undergo “political, emotional, and sexual change” as their established ways of living are brought into question over the course of the play. The play is subtitled “Wildly Inspired by George Gissing’s *The Odd Women*”. Its characters are derived from this novel (Griffiths, *Age of Arousal* 1).

Importantly, the change Griffiths depicts in *Age of Arousal*, both historically and from this Victorian piece, is revealed through the lived experience of the six characters. Griffiths concludes the extensive “Playwright’s Notes” to the published script (2007) by telling her audience:

True to the world of the middle and upper-middle classes, and true to the rising of this new age, money is more of a factor than class. All these characters have a basic education, then it’s a question of what they did with it.

Everyone in this play is on the brink of tumultuous change. (22)

The perspective provided to the audience is that each character’s journey explores the possibilities available to her or him at this time. “The world of the play is Mary’s world,” her “school for secretaries” becoming the gathering space for the characters and the impetus for much of the change (“Playwright’s Note” 19; Griffiths, *Age of Arousal* 26). A sixty-year-old “ex-militant suffragette,” Mary begins the play in a romantic

relationship with Rhoda, “a teacher at her school” (26). “An orphan who has become a New Woman with a tendency to zeal,” Rhoda Nunn is thirty five and in her partnership she helps to run the business of which Mary is the sole owner (26).

After Rhoda encounters acquaintance Virginia Madden, a forty-year-old “[i]mpoverished ex-governess and alcoholic” on the streets of London, the Madden sisters, Virginia, Alice, and Monica, enroll as pupils at the school (26). “Confused about her sexuality,” Virginia later departs for Berlin to experiment with dressing as a man after learning about such a possibility in a brochure made available at Mary’s school (Griffiths, “Age of Arousal” 406).¹⁴¹ Everard, the only man on the stage and “the spice” of the play, according to Griffiths, arrives to complicate dynamics between the women and to tempt both Monica, who experiments with polyamory, and Rhoda (Griffiths, *Interview*). However, we also watch as typewriters, the powerful and theatrical Remingtons, are brought onto the stage and into the fight for equality.

Their lives are further complicated in the second act, but this complexity leads towards a mystical, powerful concluding scene in an idyllic garden. Monica’s quest to find a suitor derails when she becomes pregnant and claims it to be Everard’s child. Simultaneously, Rhoda and Everard consider how best to move forward with their relationship by debating the merits of options available to them: marriage or a free union.

¹⁴¹ Quotations from the play script are from the 2013 version of *Age of Arousal*, published in *Modern Canadian Plays* edited by Jerry Wasserman. Since the Wasserman text only includes the script and does not reprint any of the extensive apparatus included with the 2007 text, that (2007 publication) is the most recent complete version and will be relied upon when discussing material outside of the script.

Virginia returns from Berlin having found herself most comfortable dressed as a man, yet can do so only in private. Alice begins to find comfort in her celibacy, representative of her unlearning of paternalistic beliefs. The political and historical changes that occurred during the era in which the fictional *Age of Arousal* is set are therefore depicted through each character's personal life, their sexual journey, and their growth towards understanding and self-discovery.

Age of Arousal premieres in February 2007 at the Alberta Theatre Projects' playRites festival, "associate-produced by Duchess Productions" (Griffiths, "Production History" 23). As a writer Griffiths works on this play on the page as well as at various workshops and writing retreats.¹⁴² In 2005, Karen Hines is "invited, unofficially, to come on board" and later directs the premiere production. In a decision that speaks to Griffiths's larger project within the development of *Age of Arousal*, the 2007 version is the only time her script is published with an extensive apparatus. The script is preceded by a "Foreword" by Layne Coleman (6-7), Griffiths's fifteen-page Playwright's Note (8-22), and a "Production History" (23-24). Following the script is a historical essay written by Griffiths based on her extensive research for this piece, "A Flagrantly Weird Age: A Reaction to Research, Time Travel and the History of the Suffragettes," (136-168). Also included is a "Further Reading" section listing related fiction and historical texts on subjects ranging from typewriters to suffrage, from feminist theory to "Victorians and

¹⁴² The precise start date of Griffiths's process has been lost with the first three drafts of the play, none of which are present in the various archival sources pertaining to *Age of Arousal*.

Sexuality” (169-172). In addition, the various archival traces from the process leading to *Age of Arousal* are among the most extensive of any of Griffiths’s plays and she requested Hines document her experience directing the premiere and transitioning *thoughtspeak* from page to stage. Hines calls her “Director’s Notes . . . ‘Controlling the Chaos’” and frames them as “a work in progress . . . delivered at Linda’s request” (Hines 1, 2).¹⁴³

In performance *Age of Arousal* creates an “oh-so-female chaos,” as Hines describes (2). Once Griffiths moves away from working as if “writing an adaptation” her script barrels towards a reinvention of depicting women characters on the stage (“Playwright’s Note” 9). Griffiths’s creation of *thoughtspeak* is a purposeful uncensoring of women’s personal experiences, insisting they be spoken on the stage and not left as subtext while historical material is overtly retold. The first scene of the play, “The Dream,” establishes how *Age of Arousal* intertwines the manifold investigations outlined in the setting description. Griffiths explores the representation of women’s history as the

¹⁴³ She also kindly states: “with my best wishes, in the name of what I believe to be a gorgeous play” (Hines 2). In the “Acknowledgements” to *Age of Arousal* Griffiths similarly writes a thoughtful paragraph to her director, “When playwright, actor, filmmaker, director Karen Hines came to this project in the role of dramaturge three years ago, I was blessed with a fellow artist who instantly had a DNA connection to the script. Her brilliant first production met the text like a playwright’s wet dream, but it is in her capacity as dramaturge that she made her greatest contribution. Her understanding of structure, her rigour with the *thoughtspeak* [sic], her beautifully excruciating attention to each word, helped to hone a challenging script. She worked in careful stages, using an intellect that never got in the way of the torrid emotions of the play. Hines isn’t afraid of those emotions—she can match them with her brain. She used a credo that many dramaturges could learn from: ‘First, do no harm’. Her contribution was a gift central to the development of this play” (Griffiths, “Acknowledgements” 174).

characters wrestle with an insidious often-unspoken element of gender inequality psychologists have termed benevolent sexism. These interrogations reverberate with the audience's contemporary understanding of womanhood as they recognize similarities between their lives and the lived experiences of these fictional characters. In all of these interwoven elements Griffiths creates a theatrical experience that reimagines the personal lives of first-wave feminists in order to revision the creation of women's history on the stage and, in the recognition of their experiences, to re-cognize how "[w]omen demand rights" and their perception of the continuing fight for equality (Griffiths, "Age of Arousal" 26).

Griffiths's process for *Age of Arousal* begins upon her purchase of "a battered paperback in a second-hand bookstore . . . for a dollar. It was a little-known Victorian novel by George Gissing called *The Odd Women*" (Griffiths, "Playwright's Note" 8). In interviews, programme notes, and a letter to the author in the first publication of *Age of Arousal* Griffiths makes the play's roots clear. Her insistent retelling of this story commences the audience's comprehension of her piece. Even with Moodie their discussion of *Age of Arousal* begins with Gissing. She describes reading the synopsis:

And I look over [sic] and it says 'five Victorian spinsters'. . . . I was sold. I knew at that moment that I would write something either based on it or something. And it talked about the women's movement, which I'd always wanted to know more about: the women's movement in England at the turn of the century. And I always wanted to know more about the suffragettes, which

it's not really about, but I wanted to get into that world. And I also wanted to write a play with mostly women. (Griffiths, *On Age of Arousal*)

By describing the book as “battered” in her “Playwright’s Note” and repeatedly mentioning its procurement Griffiths depicts the novel as well-worn and oft-read, yet suggests its depreciating value. In her narration *The Odd Women* is a classic piece of literature with staying power but that she manipulates for her feminist purposes. She concludes with a letter to Gissing, also included in her “Playwright’s Note,” by directly addressing him with a tone of respect, “What you did is a flawed, brilliant thing—how bad is that? How bad am I to build on it? . . . People know your work and care about it even now. I’m one of them” (Griffiths, “Playwright’s Note” 10).

Griffiths also explains, “At first I read *The Odd Women* assiduously, using lots of coloured stickies. Just the way you would if you were writing an adaptation. . . . There were many turns away, but still the first draft was reasonably close to the novel” (9). In “Ages of Arousal” Penny Farfan productively “resist[s] Griffiths’s resistance to categorizing *Age of Arousal* as an adaptation and instead, following [Linda] Hutcheon [in *A Theory of Adaptation*], approach[es] the play *as* an adaptation in order to understand it as at once an interpretation of a prior text and a distinct creation in its own right” (21). Her argument that “*Age of Arousal* is thus palimpsestic not only in its relation to *The Odd Women* but also in its relation to the history of feminism” is compelling and thoroughly explores the relationship between the play and its feminist core (22). Complimentary to such an argument is Griffiths’s subtle yet continuous undermining of Gissing’s work.

Griffiths makes substantial changes to lynchpin elements of Gissing's text, expanding upon these women's defiance of the presumptions placed upon them. There are many purposeful adjustments made to Gissing's plot, characters, and ideological choices. As she notes, "there's a lot of what I would call misogyny in *The Odd Women*, even though the basic situation is so ahead of its times. . . . But in other places it is so powerful" (Griffiths, "Playwright's Note" 10). She acknowledges the power of Gissing's work, but states emphatically that "*Age of Arousal* is a contemporary play set in the past" (18). While she maintains some of Gissing's fundamental elements of plot and of his characters, she also reimagines and reinvents the ideological foundation of the play.

A comparison of a few similar aspects of the two texts reveals why Griffiths resists Gissing's work. Firstly and most simply, her resistance is to how the story is told. While she never overtly discusses this concept in interviews, we have seen Griffiths's insistence on keeping women centre stage and she baldly states her goal of writing "a play with mostly women" (Griffiths, *On Age of Arousal*). *The Odd Women* focuses on its women characters, but there are many more men in the novel than Griffiths allows in her play. In fact, Gissing establishes his novel ostensibly about these women with the portrayal of the Madden sisters' father and his discussion of finances with Alice, "I don't think girls ought to be troubled about this kind of thing," he added apologetically. "Let men grapple with the world" (Gissing 1). Of course, Gissing's novel is ahead of its time and the narrative arc pertains to the women gaining freedom. For example, Mary in a speech declares, "There must be a new type of woman, active in every sphere of life: a

new worker out in the world, a new ruler of the home” (137). However, she continues, “Whether woman is the equal of man I neither know nor care. We are not his equal in size, in weight, in muscle, and, for all I can say, we may have less power of brain. That has nothing to do with it” and concludes, “At any cost—at any cost—we will free ourselves from the heritage of weakness and contempt!” (137). Much of her content calls for the emancipation of women, but the contemporary reader appreciates the originating power given to men by having the plot begin with the Madden sisters’ father. Such moments as Mary’s speech contain the potential for an ideology of equality but are ultimately undermined and do in fact maintain men’s dominance over women.¹⁴⁴

Moreover, while Gissing creates a strong character in Mary as the owner of a school for secretaries, Griffiths builds on this concept by having Mary as a model of women’s financial emancipation. She impactfully removes a sense of caregiving written into Mary’s work in *The Odd Women*. Rhoda says to the Madden sisters, “I must tell you about this lady—Miss Barfoot. She has private means—not large, but sufficient to allow of her combining benevolence with business. She makes it her object to train young girls for work in offices, teaching them the things I learnt in Bristol, and typewriting as well.

¹⁴⁴ I must acknowledge here that my perspective of *The Odd Women* has been affected by Griffiths since her words on the novel were my introduction to the text. As such, she pointed my attention towards these moments, and there are many. Another example lies in a moving paragraph of Rhoda’s speech when she critiques how the Madden sisters have been raised “without rational training” and proposing, “Think what capable women might do with eight hundred pounds” (Gissing 107). A meaningful statement opposing exactly what I have just discussed, except that it is preceded by describing the following paragraph as “Rhoda had one of her fits of wrathful eloquence” (Gissing 107). Here there is a powerful countering to the way the sisters were raised and prescribed to view their inheritance, but its introductory description destabilizes the meaning.

Some pay for their lessons, and some get them for nothing” (22). Later in the novel, Mary expresses a disinterest in her pupils gaining financial freedom, “to put the truth in a few words, I am not chiefly anxious that you should *earn money*, but that women in general shall become *rational and responsible human beings*” (134). In *Age of Arousal* when Alice observes “so you help needy women” Mary baldly counters, “No, this is a business, not a charity. Those who can’t afford tuition take a loan, which is paid off when they find employment” (Griffiths, “Age of Arousal” 399). Griffiths’s Mary is a successful businesswoman and the women she teaches are expected to be capable of receiving education, taking responsibility, and working towards financial security independently. Mary also foresees women’s capability in the world of business in *Age of Arousal*, “We enter the closed monolith of business humbly, as assistants and secretaries. But once our pointed boot is in the door, we may involve ourselves in commerce, investment, trade—” (399).

Finally, Griffiths opposes the Victorian view of marriage as a trade much more overtly than does Gissing. This ideology is of course engrained in the objectification of women. In *The Odd Women* Mary reprimands Rhoda, “Your zeal is eating you up. At this rate, you will hinder our purpose. We have no mission to prevent girls from marrying suitably—only to see that those who can’t shall have a means of living with some

satisfaction (Gissing 51).¹⁴⁵ Griffiths alters Mary's perspective on marriage. In *Age of Arousal* she tells the sisters:

We are not against marriage. However, every happily unmarried woman is a silent reproach to the conditions of marriage. In this context, a woman sells herself for her livelihood. She becomes the legal property of her husband, relinquishing all power over her wealth, her children, and her own body. It is legal prostitution. The woman becomes an unpaid breeding machine, with fewer rights than any spinster in this room. (Griffiths, "Age of Arousal" 397–98)

Griffiths overthrows the mandate of the school in the original text, instead choosing to foresee women's success in business endeavours, and overtly opposing marriage as a trade. Therefore, while calling *Age of Arousal* an adaptation may be technically correct, her resistance to Gissing and to a Victorian representation of women authored by a man is resoundingly purposeful and speaks to the ideological shift of her work. As she says, "I've taken his basic characters and situation and leapt off a cliff I was dying to leap off" (Griffiths, "Playwright's Note" 8). Griffiths uses *The Odd Women* as a strong foundation on which she builds a powerful piece with an ambitious form and influential ideologies.

¹⁴⁵ However, in a later conversation about Monica's marriage to Mr. Widdowson, this plot and latter character entirely removed in *Age of Arousal*, Mary concedes, "It isn't the ideal wedlock. . . . But so much in life is compromise. After all, she may regard him more affectionally than we imagine" (Gissing 120). The characterization of Mr. Widdowson as a jealous melancholic bore does comment on the shifting perspective of what constitutes a suitable marriage. Gissing describes, "The ceremony was performed at a church at Herne Hill. By an odd arrangement—like everything else in the story of this pair, a result of social and personal embarrassments" (Gissing 121).

Although Griffiths puts Gissing aside, and I agree with that idea, this desire in fact proved difficult when it came to the reviews. Interestingly, certain theatre critics debate the success of Griffiths's transformation of Gissing's novel. Kamal Al-Solaylee says of the 2007 Nightwood Theatre remount at Factory Theatre in Toronto, "His heavy novel's weight is replaced with a breezier dramatic mode that allows her characters to articulate what his could only insinuate" (R4). Other reviewers prove not as interested in her adjustment of this work, one blatantly writing of the 2010 remount at the Shaw Festival, "One would think that dramatizing the ideas expressed in the novel would be eye-opening enough. . . . Unfortunately, Griffiths is not satisfied with this and infuses Gissing's story with her own 21st century twists".¹⁴⁶ Hoile also corrects Griffiths's purposefully inaccurate historical timeline, "The first suffragette did not go on a hunger strike until 1909," questions her adjustment of character details, "Griffiths also decides the character Virginia needs a more modern reason for her alcoholism than her poverty and derives it instead from an unfulfilled desire for transvestism" and asks: "Why not appreciate the work of the Gissing's women for what it is without confusing it with later events?". Finally, he does not appreciate *thoughtspeak*, "The technique might be useful if it gave us a deeper sense of the characters, but in fact it flattens out the characterization since all six are portrayed as repressed". I can't help but think, "Yes, of course they are. But each woman's experience of that repression is different, that's the point."

¹⁴⁶ Until my response, this and the following quotations in this paragraph are taken from Christopher Hoile's review of the 2010 production of *Age of Arousal* at the Shaw Festival, published online at stage-door.com (Hoile).

A core element of Griffiths's transformation of the source text is this inclusion of *thoughtspeak*, a theatrical device of her own invention. Before delving into the processes Griffiths undergoes to create *thoughtspeak* and bring it to full form in *Age of Arousal I* will first define the device as it stands in the finished product. *Thoughtspeak* is Griffiths's "invented term" for her device which allows characters to "speak their thoughts in wild uncensored outpourings" ("Playwright's Note" 13). It appears throughout *Age of Arousal*, denoted in the text by italics, and most often comes in short bursts. The italics visually bring an urgency to these sections of the text but also ensure the characters' thoughts, often otherwise left as subtext or to be expressed physically in performance, are no longer cordoned off. Instead, Griffiths makes them visible, audible, and an integral part of the whole. She claims *thoughtspeak* as her own invention, differentiating it from dialogue and existing devices such as soliloquy, monologue, or direct address. *Thoughtspeak* creates another reality in performance, the inner world of a character being expressed, without breaking the flow of a scene.

Sometimes one or two characters *thoughtspeak* simultaneously, but at other times chaotic moments happen when three or more characters *thoughtspeak* in one scene. These occurrences are "a verbal eruption from the depths of self" although Griffiths specifies that while some "thoughts come to the surface" not all of their thoughts are spoken ("Playwright's Note" 13). Central to Griffiths's multiple definitions and descriptions of *thoughtspeak* is the revelation of the characters as beings whose emotional responses to their experiences are complex and at times contradictory. This device therefore un-

censors the characters and allows them to express what has hitherto been unavailable to them, “To the characters, mere dialogue is not enough to contain the enormity of their emotional/intellectual struggle with the world” (13). *Thoughtspeak* therefore becomes central to the Griffiths’s re-visioning of the suffrage era and her reimagining of individuals who lived through this time. Moreover, as even the work of defining *thoughtspeak* presents, this device’s importance dwells both in the text and at the level of performance.

In the apparatus to *Age of Arousal* Griffiths recounts how her text in process begins to move on its own once she decides to stray from Gissing: “The thing started galloping, and I could barely keep up” (9). The fuel of this urgency comes from her decision to veer from writing an adaptation and “to experiment with what [she] beg[ins] to call thoughtspeak [sic]” (9). She describes a shift in perspective upon her decision to have the subtext spoken, “My own research on the women’s suffrage movement and the Victorian age took precedence over the novel. I deliberately avoided the book, refusing to read it again” (9). Yet, Griffiths’s process pauses after writing a fourth draft of this adaptation, “Months later I looked at the script and was totally bored” and provides the reason for her renewed inspiration, “I was sick of subtext—the whole point of the Victorians was that there was so much underneath, but why should it be eternally underneath?” (9). Her narration of her creation process, which coincides with the move from conceiving of her play as an adaptation, means her characters will not have their personal experiences and feelings left in the subtext.

An analysis of Griffiths's numerous drafts provides further context to this transition that she describes in *Age of Arousal*. Archival traces in the Linda Griffiths fonds at the University of Guelph pertaining to *Age of Arousal* are curiously and uncharacteristically sparse. Layne Coleman commented that, by happenstance, "[t]here are a few boxes and archives not at Guelph" that upon examination contain most of Griffiths's process in creating *Age of Arousal*, among a great deal of other material from the later years of her career (Coleman, *Linda Griffiths - I*).¹⁴⁷ Additionally, Griffiths's agent Michael Petrsek emailed me drafts of this play in files she had sent to him, along with Karen Hines' "Controlling the Chaos" (Petrsek).

Amalgamating these various archival traces reveals Griffiths's process for *Age of Arousal*. Firstly, as I have already discussed, Griffiths embraces *thoughtspeak* as a central element of *Age of Arousal* only as she begins to move away from writing an adaptation. Secondly, she brings *thoughtspeak* to this play as a partially-created method she has been using throughout her career to explore the possibility of characters verbally expressing their inner thoughts and feelings. Thirdly, once Griffiths brings *thoughtspeak* into her rendition of *The Odd Women* she undergoes a process to make it work within this new context, depicting historical women and imagining their lived experiences, as well as their internal journey during these great changes.

¹⁴⁷ My immense gratitude goes to Layne Coleman for entrusting me with Griffiths's unarchived papers. They were invaluable to the completion of this dissertation.

Griffiths's invented theatrical device of *thoughtspeak* is the ultimate example of her reliance upon discovery in process. She describes her career-long focus on expressing the inner world of her characters in the apparatus to the publication of *Age of Arousal*, "On the page, thoughtspeak [sic] is the thing that will either get people excited or turn them off. It's different in performance. I hate to call it a device or a technique, since having characters expectorate their inner feelings has often been part of my work" ("Playwright's Note" 14).¹⁴⁸ Griffiths acknowledges the lacunae inherent in the page to stage transition of *thoughtspeak*, but her use of the word "expectorate" to describe her exploration of characters' "inner feelings" is telling (14). This medical term with a corporeal focus brings these *thoughtspeak* moments into the visceral realm of the body.

Looking at *thoughtspeak* with the hindsight of having watched Griffiths's progression as a creator and with the insight of her own observations allows for a detailed, complex, and nuanced significance to develop from this device. Beginning with *Maggie & Pierre* she traces the origins of *thoughtspeak* to moments when "the Pierre Trudeau character bursts out with the unspoken at regular intervals, as does Maggie" (14). Recalling this play, a scene that immediately comes to mind is Pierre's description of feeling uncomfortable watching Maggie express herself. As discussed in Chapter 1, he expresses contradictory feelings of wanting to comfort while also experiencing jealousy "that she could be so free" (Griffiths and Thompson, "M&P" 32). This moment provides

¹⁴⁸ I choose to define *thoughtspeak* as a device despite Griffiths's reluctance to do so because, as this chapter explores, it is an important culmination of multiple explorations unique to her oeuvre.

insight into the contradictory nature inherent in the experience of intense emotions. Griffiths transforms Pierre into a character whose emotional world, once expressed, contradicts his outward performance of a masculine stoicism prescribed by gender essentialism.

Likewise, during a conversation with Henry about Pierre's deliberations over "marrying a twenty-two-year-old flower child" the latter speaks italicized text (18). Upon Henry's inquiry "How do you feel about her, or something like that? I don't know" Pierre gives a long reply including an early version of *thoughtspeak*, "I think perhaps it is time for me to embark on the ultimate relationship between a man and a woman—I want a wife!!—the sharing of a lifetime...I see little children playing in the street, and I think, I love children—I want sons!!—and daughters. I feel experiences welling up inside of me such as I've never felt before—I want someone to fuck me silly!!—I don't know, I'm baffled" (18–19). Pierre's decorous considerations juxtapose his short, viscerally driven outbursts. These moments begin to uncover the roots of Griffiths's development of *thoughtspeak*, which at this early point in her career are sparse, and Griffiths neither consistently annotates them in the text nor mentions the creation of a device. She seems to develop *thoughtspeak* in this improvised play but does not use it again for some time.

A decade later, *The Darling Family* premieres with SHE and HE speaking their thoughts, which are indicated by italics in the text. *Thoughtspeak* is used throughout *The Darling Family*, but Griffiths does little to articulate the significance of the italics beyond stating in the "Characters and Setting" section, "italics without parentheses indicate the

spoken thoughts of the two characters” (“Darling” 147). While writing *The Darling Family* Griffiths “first used italics to annotate the difference between spoken dialogue and unspoken, inspired by Caryl Churchill” (“Playwright’s Note” 14). With the benefit of hindsight, in Chapter 2 I label these italicized sections of the text *thoughtspeak* and argue that in performance they portray the starkly contradictory nature between what SHE and HE say to each other and what they feel. From the moment they learn about the pregnancy *thoughtspeak* conveys their thoughts about the news, although their conversation occurs in a different fragment of the script than the *thoughtspeak* (Griffiths, “Darling” 150–51, 152–53). Moments of *thoughtspeak* are interspersed between dialogue elsewhere in the performance. *Thoughtspeak* here functions somewhat like Pierre’s outbursts, yet the *thoughtspeak* is neither as seamless nor appears as frequently as in *Age of Arousal*. In these early works, Griffiths uses this technique to portray the thoughts of her characters which completely contradict what they say to one another and often reveal unspoken inner truth. Griffiths says, at this time, it is a concept in process.

In *Age of Arousal*, *thoughtspeak* emerges through Griffiths’s reliance upon discovery in process as she works to develop another method of women’s representation on the stage. Griffiths gives these public figures the illusory opportunity on stage to express themselves in ways not acceptable in the public forum. That Griffiths most thoroughly uses and develops *thoughtspeak* in a play about abortion, *The Darling Family*, which features both SHE and HE, and that she goes on to develop it in a play about women’s suffrage, indicates her career-long search for new forms to contain her

challenges to accepted power structures and to pervasive ideologies. Indeed, with *Age of Arousal* Griffiths is not adapting *The Odd Women* and she is not writing a historical play about the suffrage movement. She reinvents concepts pertaining to women's agency, the fight to break free from oppression, the censorship rooted in repression, and she continues to refuse presumptions placed upon her women characters.

In these plays Griffiths engages in the process of creating *thoughtspeak* as both the creator and the performer. Contrastingly, Griffiths never performs in *Age of Arousal*. Archival traces of Griffiths's writerly work on drafts of this play reveal that upon her decision to use *thoughtspeak* in *Age of Arousal* she begins to adjust the device. The only remaining trace of the adaptation phase of the process is the electronic draft of the play's first act, dated "June 11.05," which she sends to Petrsek (Griffiths, *Odd Women*). Earlier drafts of her play bear the title of Gissing's novel, *The Odd Women*. This extant example does include *thoughtspeak*, although Griffiths has not yet found its final form. Labeled "Fourth Draft," it also has a note on the front page, "wildly inspired by the novel by George Gissing" (Griffiths, *Odd Women* 1). As Griffiths's work progresses this note remains but Griffiths creates her own title, first *The Unsexed* and then *Age of Arousal*. This adjustment represents her process, which similarly navigates her play's relationship to Gissing's text.

There is indeed a gap from June 2005 to September 2005 when, as she indicates, Griffiths returns to the script with a title change, according to a purple post-it note denoting this manuscript "Kelly Thornton's copy of *The Unsexed*" (Griffiths,

“Playwright’s Note” 9; Griffiths, *Thornton’s Copy*).¹⁴⁹ Subsequently, Griffiths writes drafts in October and November of 2005 (*The Unsexed, Oct 05*; *The Unsexed, Nov 05*). This period of work culminates in another draft that she also sends to Petrusek, dated “March 18.06,” and now titled *Age of Arousal* (Griffiths, *AoA Mar 06*). Akin to the title’s drastic change between the June and October 2005 drafts is Griffiths’s conceptualization of the play in a section titled “The approach and the thoughtspeak [sic]” (Griffiths, *Odd Women* 3). In fact, in these drafts Griffiths works with a statement that becomes “The mantra for the whole play,” which she writes in the published version “is ‘the text should be acted on the lines, not between the lines’” (Griffiths, “Playwright’s Note” 14).

The setting and dramatis personae proceed a section Griffiths titles “The approach and the thoughtspeak [sic]” in the 2005 draft (Griffiths, *Odd Women* 3). She begins with two succinct and meaningful sentences, “*Passion rules the odd women, as it did in the Victorian Era. All the characters are embroiled with themselves—overwhelmed with the contradictions of their Age, their sexuality, and the Woman Question*” (3). Followed by a paragraph outlining her vision for costumes, Griffiths defines her device, “The characters speak their thoughts in wild uncensored outpourings. Thoughtspeak [sic]. The best way to get a sense of how the thoughtspeak [sic] works is to have a reading. The play is discovered between the lines” (3). At this early stage in the process Griffiths articulates

¹⁴⁹ Although *Age of Arousal* does not premiere at Nightwood Theatre, this note suggests she is in contact with their Artistic Director at the time, Kelly Thornton. This company does, however, present the Toronto premiere of *Age of Arousal* at Factory Theatre, which runs November-December in 2007 (Griffiths, “Production History” 23).

the core function of *thoughtspeak* as uncensored and uncontrolled speech. She also proposes how it should work in performance, describing the device as “verbose and quick, it should spill out like diamonds from a velvet box” and she insists the rhythm be found in rehearsal while indicating “*The Odd Women* should be played at a high level of intensity and passion” (*Women* 3). When it comes to articulating its purpose within the duality of text/subtext, however, she initially attributes the meaning to be “discovered between the lines” (3). At this early phase in the process, *thoughtspeak*’s uncensoring juxtaposes Griffiths’s statement that the meaning is subtextual and to be found in performance. It is a very important distinction, therefore, that Griffiths later chooses to make the entire “mantra” of the play its necessity of being “acted on the lines,” that is, nothing to be left as subtext (Griffiths, “Playwright’s Note” 14).

Griffiths continues to play with this section in each subsequent draft. By October 2005, once she has decidedly put Gissing’s text aside, her “The approach and the thoughtspeak [sic]” section undergoes an integral change, “*The Unsexed* should be acted *on* the lines, not between the lines” (Griffiths, *The Unsexed*, Oct 05 3). Following this first half of the page overviewing costumes and the play’s relationship to history, the second half has a subheading “The thoughtspeak [sic]” (3). She distills the earlier definition about *thoughtspeak* in performance, including their description as “wild uncensored outpourings” that “spill out like diamonds from a velvet box” and created a necessary “double rhythm” (3). In other words, she has removed subtext and these

instructions insist it does not return. This alteration is discovered during the process of rewriting and editing these early drafts.

With the shift in her understanding of both the play as her own creation rather than a strict adaptation as well as this new understanding of the play's insistence upon being "acted *on* the lines" she goes on to provide a more thorough understanding of how *thoughtspeak* functions in performance (3). She states that these "sections are not asides to the audience, they are part of the scenes themselves" and clarifies: "Often they can be spoken directly to the other actor—who holds the emotion and intention of the previous regular dialogue" (3). She also begins to provide a description of different kinds of *thoughtspeak* that will be further explained in the published text. Finally, Griffiths concludes with a line that endures, "Everyone and everything in this play is on the brink of tumultuous change" (3). Once again aligning form, content, and performance, Griffiths creates a text that at both levels of page and stage portrays a great change for the characters that foresees continued hope and growth for future generations.

Having crafted *thoughtspeak* and worked on varying definitions and functions, Griffiths then takes *Age of Arousal* back to the level of performance. She collaborates with director Karen Hines to determine how it might be translated back from page onto the stage. Although *Age of Arousal* is primarily written, the process that forms *thoughtspeak* is not completed on the page. Hines explains in "Controlling the Chaos" that "[t]hrough the play was largely written, we were all discovering the *how* of it together. And that 'how' would, in turn, inform the final stage of writing" (12). In her

“Playwright’s Note” Griffiths explains, “Throughout the process of development I fiercely maintained that thoughtspeak [sic] would not only work like crazy for the audience, but ultimately would be actor-friendly—even joyful to play” (14). Indeed, as both Griffiths and Hines indicate, the scope of *Age of Arousal* is much larger than simply its historical foundation and its form. It is among the largest plays Griffiths has written, a complex piece that Hines calls a “six-actor period extravaganza” (7). Griffiths also brings the methods for women’s self-representation that she has developed as actor-playwright and moulds them for this fictional representation of suffrage-era, Victorian women. Hines explains in “Controlling the Chaos” that “[t]his delicate, precarious place we were in was one that Linda and I were eminently familiar with, both of us coming from a history of improvised, on-your-feet writing. . . . We were inventing a new style for a new form” (12–13).

Another stage in the process that Griffiths does not describe begins to emerge with this insight from Hines. *Thoughtspeak* as a device develops from focus on the inner workings of characters, but now with Griffiths only as playwright, the challenge becomes how to transform this connection within the text to the actors. Together Hines and Griffiths develop a performance grammar for this new method of expressing characters’ thoughts. Hines explain, “What *Age of Arousal* seemed to call for was a system whereby secondary and tertiary realities could be created without breaking the action but at the same time absolutely changing reality’s rules . . . I was looking for a system in performance that would absolutely, yet unobtrusively, guide the watchers’ attention and

orient them in this very specific and layered reality. Otherwise too much would be missed” (3). Griffiths’s vision is not prescriptive, “Linda had not written *Age* with a mind to dictating how the thoughtspeak [sic] would work in this new context, but what she knew unequivocally was this: thoughtspeak [sic] must not break the stride or the reality. It must heighten reality. And deepen it. And widen it...” (Hines 7). In terms of developing a performance grammar to match these elements of *thoughtspeak*, Hines settles upon the necessity of what the premiere production’s “company began to refer to as ‘privacy’,” which she regards as “perhaps the most direct and effective component in our production’s demarcation of thoughtspeak [sic]” (8). This performance grammar provides the characters with privacy on the stage, but also ensures that the audience will hear their personal thoughts.

This performance grammar also explains why Griffiths insists *thoughtspeak* is not an aside. In *Age of Arousal* she provides space on stage for women to speak these previously censored, private experiences in the public arena. Hines explains, “Thoughtspeak [sic] is something more mysterious and internal” than asides that “seem, at first, an obvious and simple possibility. But brief experiments will reveal that asides create an arch and unfeminine effect that slows momentum and undermines that beautifully roiling chaos that is *Age of Arousal*. Asides are too clunky. They are too masculine. They are too obvious. They undermine *Age of Arousal*’s (e)motion, mood, tone” (6). Distancing the play from established methods of writing and performance, *thoughtspeak* requires everyone on stage and in the audience to give these characters

space to express themselves. In fact, one of Everard's *thoughtspeak* moments exemplifies Griffiths's device when, at the end of "Budding Morsel," his long *thoughtspeak* speech resembles a soliloquy (Griffiths, "Age of Arousal" 396–97). This tidy, lengthy pontification textually and in performance contrasts with the *thoughtspeak* that at every other instance comes in fragmented, often overlapped, "wild uncensored outpourings" of "torrid emotions" (Griffiths, "Playwright's Note" 13; Griffiths, "Acknowledgements" 174).

Griffiths makes the characters' personal lives political or, as Scott writes of both *Age of Arousal* and *Chronic*, "the meaning of the personal experience is inextricably social" ("Sickness and Sexuality" 38). Indeed, Griffiths depicts the politically dense period through the personal experiences of her characters. Griffiths ponders fictional representation while reading about historical women during this time, "We can only imagine what they said to Josephine Butler's husband, George, for allowing his wife to go on the road to speak of sex, prostitution and gonorrhoea. We'll never know what went on in those bedrooms or how hard it got" (Griffiths, "Flagrantly" 159–60). History has not remembered the personal, private experiences of suffragettes, but Griffiths, as a contemporary playwright, can imagine possibilities in her illusory form. *Age of Arousal* therefore participates in what Hadfield calls the "redressing" of women's absence from historical theatre tradition, "feminists have begun to write the gaps in the stages of a History that has excluded women. These historical (re)visions must address the traditional separation between 'public' and 'private' spaces and render visible a female

tradition in both drama and theatre that has been publicly erased” (24). Griffiths reimagines the personal lives of first-wave feminists through the plot of *Age of Arousal* and redresses the representation of women by reinventing how her characters express themselves on the stage.

She begins the section on “Performance Style” by prescribing “The play is crammed with ideas, but that’s not really what’s going on. Each actor must struggle to find a visceral connection to those ideas” (“Playwright’s Note” 13).¹⁵⁰ This necessary visceral connection correlates with her own strong presence in performance, which she previously relies upon to enhance each piece. Now, Griffiths as playwright develops *thoughtspeak* which, as Hines asserts, “seem[s] to promise an intensification that would draw the audience right inside the play at a visceral level” (3). By watching the process of development that leads to *thoughtspeak* being performed for audiences it becomes clear that it is a device that allows other actors to imitate Griffiths’s visceral connection to her work and her ability to connect with the audience in an intense, meaningful way. Transformed into *Age of Arousal*’s exploration of the lived experience of historical women this visceral nature overtly counters “the space into which women have traditionally been interpellated, the (no) place from whence *our* history has (not) happened” (Hadfield 17). Griffiths, however, can imagine this history and insists it be expressed openly.

¹⁵⁰ Griffiths teaches a class, “Visceral Playwriting,” through her company Duchess Productions (Nothof, “Griffiths, Linda”).

In *Age of Arousal* the play's relationship with the real, its juxtaposition of realism with pure invention, adaptation and wild inspiration is in fact the key to understanding it. This play "doesn't take place in historical reality but in a fabulist construct—an idea, a dream of Victorian England. It is stuffed with historical facts and modern/Victorian issues, but the world created is unreal. The leaping-off point is the thoughtspeak [sic], which is a tangible way to reveal the unreality. . . . Always there should be a tension between the genuine struggle of each character to evolve and the dance of fantasy as the play unfolds" (Griffiths, "Playwright's Note" 12). Griffiths over the course of her career has been experimenting with ways for her characters to express their inner world.

Age of Arousal opens with "The Dream," a scene which begins with Mary having awoken from a nightmare about her experiences as a suffragette. In performance the audience sees Mary "*shaking in RHODA's arms*" as they hear the latter soothing her partner, "Shhhhh..." (Griffiths, "Age of Arousal" 392). In this opening scene the play explains nothing. The audience encounters historical material through the present moment of the characters' lives. Mary recounts to Rhoda her "nightmare of epic proportions," haunted by memories of being jailed for her participation in the suffrage movement (392). She relives in these recurring nightmares the gruesome history of women being arrested and, while imprisoned, going on hunger strikes as an act of nonviolent protest. These women were routinely force-fed, their bodies brutalized in the process. Mary recounts, "Three matrons . . . pry my mouth open, wrench the clamp between my teeth (breaking two), I feel the blood running down my face, then the

feeding tube—” but she stops herself, “this is silly” (392). As she and Rhoda discuss her nightmare Mary goes no further than her dream, leaving this historical material to be represented only through her current experience, “The last time they kicked me out the prison door, I could barely walk” (392). This method of depicting history through Mary’s dream, which stems from her memory of bodily trauma, imagines the lived reality of women who fought for suffrage.

The women’s dialogue goes on to introduce their relationship, their historical moment, and their place in this history. Griffiths integrates nuanced details from her historical research into their conversation. For example, there is a sense of a “diary entry by Gladys Roberts, a hunger striker,” that Griffiths quotes in the historical essay: “I wonder if those outside are thinking about us. I am a coward” (“Flagrantly” 158). Griffiths observes a similar pattern of suffragists considering themselves as “cowards when common sense would suggest the opposite” (158). In the play she makes no mention of this research, instead transforming her historical knowledge into a simple reply of Mary’s to Rhoda’s admiration of her endurance of “torture” (Griffiths, “Age of Arousal” 392). Mary corrects her companion, “That’s not what haunts me. It is the feeling of loss, as if I failed to stand up to the test. The dream reminds me of what a coward I was” (392). Griffiths imagines, through Mary, the lived reality of ex-suffragettes who perceive their participation in the movement differently than the next generation of feminists might.

Rhoda correspondingly expresses an uneasiness about her place in this fight for equality, “I’m afraid I would run away as soon as I was truly challenged” (393). Just as Mary’s dream aligns with Gladys Roberts’s diary entry, Griffiths’s own grappling with learning about this period of history resonates in Rhoda’s reflections. In the historical essay Griffiths writes, “As I read, I can feel the fire rising. Given the right circumstances, I believe I would have thrown my young life into the movement—whether I would have undertaken hunger striking or arson is a big question, but the call to plunge myself into a cause has always been strong in me” (“Flagrantly” 163–64). She concludes by asking “Who knows how far any of us would have gone? The question reverberates through *Age of Arousal*—how far do you go?” (164). Rhoda’s response to Mary represents the desire for equality which indeed reverberates between generations of women who continue to feel uncertainty about how it can be best achieved, and what impact any one individual may have. Griffiths establishes in “The Dream” an intertwining of these various elements without creating a linear history, instead memorializing the personal struggles of these women and un-censoring their thoughts on the stage.

Mary’s time in the suffrage movement came to an end when she was released from prison barely able to walk. “I couldn’t help thinking of the rich women who always had a carriage waiting, pillows for their arses, new dresses to complement their slim figures” (Griffiths, “Age of Arousal” 392). Mary’s explanation for why she chose to leave the movement lays the foundation of *Age of Arousal*, “I found I wanted money. I wanted it, I wanted women to have it. You don’t know me. Laying down my sword to

open a school for secretaries” (393). As the scene ends Mary proposes they “retire to [her] rare and sinister boudoir” (393). Rhoda playfully attests, “Your boudoir is ever a garden of delights,” yet emphasizes their working relationship, which is equally threatening to Victorian societal norms, “Let’s do some sinister business” (393). With this suggestion their conversation returns to the question of the distinct class differences between members of the suffrage movement.

Finally, Mary mentions the return of her “cousin Everard . . . from abroad” (393). Rhoda inquires “Will we see him?” to which Mary replies “I believe we must” before discussing their students (393). The scene transitions into a lengthy section of *thoughtspeak* when Rhoda does not follow Mary’s train of thought. “*RHODA shivers*” and wonders, “*What has happened? Has something happened? A moment, a perfect ordinary moment and yet as if some certainty is disappearing—*” (393). In this second portion of the scene “the absolute disconnectedness of each character from the other’s thoughts was, and is, essential” (“Playwright’s Note” 15). Thus, with the historical foundations having been laid, the plot follows these women as “confusion reigns” and they feel the change begin (Griffiths, “Age of Arousal” 391). Mary also becomes lost in thought, “*She’s going to leave me, perhaps not yes, she will, she doesn’t know but I know—*” (393).

Griffiths begins to play with the dynamic created by having the characters’ private thoughts played at the same level of performance as the historical material. As Griffiths indicates with the setting description, the lives of these characters undergo immense

change and their preconceptions are challenged (391). As such, there are myriad possibilities to follow in an analysis of this text. To bring my study of Griffiths's career to its conclusion I will pursue three explorations in *Age of Arousal* that each pertains to Griffiths's centre-stage depiction of these fictional women. Firstly, Griffiths purposefully explores how empowerment can be developed through an exploration of women and money. Secondly, the typewriting aspect of the secretarial education receives great emphasis, which creates metaphorical reverberations, regarding women's voice and self-expression. Finally, the conclusion Griffiths creates for each woman's journey ensures this "contemporary play set in the past" can enable the audience to re-cognize the continued fight for equality and against persisting unspoken ideologies (Griffiths, "Playwright's Note" 18).

With the historical foundations established the play moves forward to Rhoda's chance encounter with Virginia Madden. Upon their acquaintance with all three Madden sisters, Rhoda and Mary accept them as students at their school. The central premise of the school for secretaries has not received a great deal of attention. Kelly acknowledges, "By conflating and even reversing New Woman events from the 1880s, such as the advent of typewriting and independent living for unmarried women, with narrated events from the later suffrage era, such as the force feeding of imprisoned suffragists, Griffiths relegates the campaign for the vote to a heroic past and focuses her characters' energies on struggling for economic independence and sexual self-understanding, issues resonant with today's audiences" (655). Scott also identifies "[t]heir struggle for economic

independence, in a non-traditional field and in a changing social climate” as the “key” to *Age of Arousal*” (“Sickness and Sexuality” 39). These observations speak to the immediate social context of the play’s setting. Indeed, very few options would have been available to these women, depicted in the play through Monica’s difficulties as a shop girl and Alice and Virginia’s lack of success finding teaching positions. However, *Age of Arousal* at every turn speaks to both this historical context and the contemporary moment of the audience’s lived reality.

In 2013 I had the opportunity to interview Linda Griffiths about *Age of Arousal*. At the time my research was considering this play alongside *Diana of Dobson’s*, which she lists in the “Further Reading” section (172). I hear Griffiths in hindsight acknowledging the connections, “that’s right,” she so kindly affirms (Griffiths, *Interview*).¹⁵¹ Yet, at multiple times throughout our conversation she guides the focus away from this historical material, “it had less to do with what I was interested in . . . I was interested in women and money, women at that time and money, how they dealt with it . . . how that worked and their attitudes towards it”. She later speaks specifically about the Madden “sisters on the verge of genteel starvation”. Recounting historical material is not Griffiths’s focus. She explores the lives of these women as they gain empowerment by learning a skill that enables them to support themselves and find independence in this changing society.

¹⁵¹ This and the following quotations in this paragraph are taken from my interview with Griffiths (Griffiths, *Interview*).

In the second scene, “The Bump,” Virginia’s intoxicated state means she requires Rhoda’s assistance to return home. This moment provides the audience with a glimpse into what their living circumstances have become in “The Bedsit” (Griffiths, “Age of Arousal” 393–94). “*Three chairs represent a barren bedsit*” where Alice has remained due to illness (394). As they become reacquainted, the cause of the sisters’ circumstances is revealed to be poverty, which began with the death of their father. Alice laments, “Father, who was the whole world to us, where is his protection, oh God, his protection” and she narrates their dwindling circumstances with Virginia (394). Their father and two sisters, Martha and Isabel died. Then upon the death of their “guardian, Mr. Humelford,” the estate diminished until they had “nothing left” but their small inheritance, to be divided between the remaining three sisters (394–95). In *thoughtspeak* Rhoda baldly observes “*the genteel starvation*” in which the sisters now find themselves (394).

As their conversation continues the sisters reveal a taught and internalized pusillanimity to think independently about their financial situation. Upon the mention of their inheritance of eight hundred pounds Rhoda says, “Not riches, but a fair sum. . . . Eight hundred pounds could be invested in any number of enterprises” (395). Alice and Virginia enter into a revealing and repetitive dialogue,

ALICE. We were advised by the guardian our father appointed never to touch
the / principal

VIRGINIA. Never touch the principal

ALICE. It is our only security, the only bit of ground we stand on—

VIRGINIA. When we grow old and useless. . . . Then the principal will be all
that keeps us from—

ALICE. The workhouse.

VIRGINIA. The workhouse. (395)

Rhoda immediately counters, “Women must stop leaving money matters to male guardians and protectors” (395). In the sisters’ explication, which is contradictory to Rhoda’s immediate understanding of the inheritance as an investment opportunity, it becomes clear that Alice and Virginia’s living circumstances have developed because they follow prescriptions made by the now-deceased men in their life. They recite these opinions and pieces of advice as fact, despite the world having changed around them.

Rhoda enters into a speech about the “imbalance in the population of such enormity that it must be a sign from God,” giving rise to the necessity of changing expectations of marriage for all women (395). Rhoda declares that “[t]he greatest opportunity has been given to us, as though someone were saying, ‘I take away your props, your supports, your income, aye your slavery and degradation. You cannot marry, you cannot have children, you must rise up—you must be odd!’” (395). Alice and Virginia demonstrate an inability to cognize such new thoughts as after a “*Pause*” they go into a domestic tizzy about their guest’s chair and the necessity of a pillow, “Too hard a chair. She needs a pillow, would you like a pillow?” Alice asks, and without waiting for a reply the sisters continue, “She should have a pillow,” “Not that pillow,” “We cannot use the bed pillow” (395). The nervous agitation continues until Rhoda relieves them,

“No pillow!” (395). Their preoccupation with the role of caring for their guest demonstrates an ingrained behaviour of avoiding considering serious issues by obsessing about domestic matters.

Once the sisters settle their conversation returns to the subject of finances, which tellingly leads back to the question of marriage. Rhoda says, “I work for a woman of independent means. My employer and I run a school for odd women. . . . Women must come to grips with two things in this age. Loneliness and money” (395). In this scene Griffiths builds the ideological foundations of the play that she explains to me in 2013,

I had done some corporate teaching for years. . . . And it was really interesting to me to talk about the whole idea of women in positions of leadership and what that does. And so I liked the idea of Mary being . . . someone who had been very idealistic but realizing until women had access to money a lot of things weren’t going to change. (Griffiths, *Interview*)

With *Age of Arousal* Griffiths depicts the world in which empowerment of women as individuals begins. As the women discuss the implausibility of marrying to find stability and support from a husband the scene ends with a final query from Alice, “Then you are odd, Miss Nunn?” (Griffiths, “Age of Arousal” 396). In a moment of self-definition Rhoda declares “Ferociously odd” (396). The audience witnesses the first generation of women finding independence. They decide that remaining unmarried is not peculiar but a fierce and powerful stance that will enable a woman to build independence in her home and with her work.

This intergenerational relationship between women in the Victorian era and the current experiences of women speaks to Griffiths's recurring consideration of ancestors in the apparatus to *Age of Arousal*. Griffiths concludes in her research essay, "As I felt the echoes and foretellings of this struggle reverberate through time, I began to recognize the power of language to undermine political action" ("Flagrantly" 165). In fact, Griffiths's first statement in her "Playwright's Note" also reaches across generations of women, "In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women fought in confusion and clarity, wisely and stupidly, for liberation. . . . These are my philosophical ancestors" (8). In her work to memorialize the feminist struggle for liberation, Griffiths uses Mary's school to theatricalize the emergence of women writing as providing opportunities for self-definition.

Typewriters are essential props in this play. Despite the confusion during their first encounter Virginia, Alice, and Monica do accept Rhoda's invitation to visit Mary's school in a scene titled "The Remingtons" (Griffiths, "Age of Arousal" 397). The antidote to their financial difficulties and to Monica's awful work environment as a shop girl is learning to type. "I will now give a demonstration of our secret weapon in the battle for equal opportunity" declares Mary before she "*draws aside a curtain and reveals three Remington type machines, circa 1885, splendidly lit*" and introduced by a "[m]agical sound cue" (399). Mary and Rhoda give a theatrical performance as they "perform blindfolded," typing at the Remingtons "*like virtuoso pianists*" (399). "*What follows is a thrilling percussive duet played on the typewriter keys. The rhythms are*

complex and gutsy, reminiscent of tap dancing. They build to a crescendo. RHODA and MARY end with a flourish and remove their blindfolds, amid clapping” (399). The Remingtons receive theatrical emphasis in a scene that also entails an expansion of the topics Rhoda discusses with the sisters earlier. The performance of women demonstrating their practical skill with such theatricality creates a metatheatrical emphasis upon the artistic possibilities available to them. Moreover, with Mary and Monica now present, the five women in *Age of Arousal* engage in a detailed conversation about marriage and the possibility of becoming odd women. The scene also includes a *thoughtspeak* aria when the affluent Mary provides the starving sisters with a buffet. This key scene in the play demonstrates the power of the typewriters as well as the empowerment women can provide one another. These scenes, predicated on typing lessons, lead into discussions of the personal change occurring for each character.

During Alice and Virginia’s first lesson the central importance of the typewriters is furthered. Rhoda instructs, “Think of the type machine as a literary piano. Begin by pressing the keys at random, to get the feel of them” (403). However, when the sisters attempt this new skill they initially find “[i]t makes no impression,” and Rhoda appeals, “Press harder. (*showing her*)” (403). Through instruction and demonstration, combining gesture and language, Rhoda imparts this ability to the sisters. Again, as in “Bedsit,” they initially resist. Virginia insists, “I cannot learn, I do not understand,” and Alice quickly requests a “rest” (403). Rhoda refutes this performance of frailty, “I understand that both of you are in poor health but—” (403). Alice interrupts to defend her stance, but Virginia

exclaims, “Why didn’t Father see to it that we were fit for something!” (404). Dutiful Alice asks, “What has Father to do with learning / to use a type machine—” but Virginia refuses to return to this thought process, “We can’t even teach school properly. Did he think our great beauty and brilliant conversation would buy us husbands?” (404). When Rhoda steps in, “Fathers want their daughters to be compliant / feminine in the sense of—” Alice once interrupts, “What do you know?” to which her instructor replies, “I know how to typewrite. *RHODA begins typing under*” (404). Griffiths builds with both language and “with gestic insistence” the importance of women learning to write (Dolan 435). This metaphorically contradicts the gender performance these women have been taught by their father, an ingrained assumption of inability. During their lesson Rhoda is physically teaching Alice and Virginia how to make an imprint on the page, an impact, with the type machine.

Likewise, when Monica arrives at the school for her first lesson, her time with Rhoda evolves into a debate about marriage and gender equality. Here Rhoda counters the refrain spoken of and by Monica, “Monica is pretty, Monica must marry” (Griffiths, “Age of Arousal” 395). As with these various ideas that Virginia and Alice repeat, Monica has internalized the belief that her beauty equates with the necessity to marry. She asks Rhoda, “what do you think of a girl marrying to help not only her own situation but that of others?” (406). Rhoda initially evades the question by continuing the lesson, but eventually breaks down, “Then marry. Give over to servitude, ravishment, and theft. Become a sex slave. . . . In the future, it will be possible to exist with a man as an equal”

(406). Yet Monica is aghast when she learns this equality can only be found with decades of work, “Thirty years...I’ll be fifty!” (406). In each circumstance Rhoda teaches the sisters how to typewrite. In their time together they also discuss matters pertaining to their era and which speak to the continued understanding of the experience of womanhood.

Indeed, Kelly focuses her article “Making the Bones Sing: The Feminist History Play, 1976-2010” on the “expressions of a felt need to re-imagine women’s past lives as a first step towards living a more just and present future” (645). In *Age of Arousal* we watch the characters struggle for liberty and empowerment in the realm of finances as well as in learning a method to express one’s self, transmit ideas, and culture that culminates in the power of the written word. Writing about performance theory’s debate surrounding the visibility of feminist work, D. A. Hadfield concludes “Somehow, women’s histories must be allowed to take place, without simply inscribing them into male-dictated modes of representation, where they can be comfortably absorbed” (39). Before the sisters’ first lesson Mary and Rhoda go to see Everard, the cousin introduced as a “hedonist” during “The Dream” (Griffiths, “Age of Arousal” 393).

Everard no longer practises medicine, but in Rhoda’s and our first glimpse of the character Mary meets with him as patient for a gynecological examination. Scott argues of this scene that as a doctor Everard is “compromised and suspect” since he “has already retired from the profession” (“Sickness and Sexuality” 43). Interestingly, a conversation with Mary serves to bring all medical professionals in this period under suspicion,

MARY. Couldn't the instrument be warmed?

EVERARD. Then visit a real physician.

MARY. Real physicians place it in ice. (Griffiths, "Age of Arousal" 401)¹⁵²

Earlier during their appointment Mary likewise asks Everard about his belief "that women in menopause automatically become nymphomaniacs" (400). From a contemporary perspective the audience knows this theory to be rooted in sexism. Everard's reply that he "no longer believe[s] in automatic ovario-uterine excitement" depicts his character as forward-thinking, but the medicalized term for such an incorrect theory introduces the misunderstandings of women's physiology in the institutional education and practice of medical doctors (400). Everard proudly tells Mary he also knows "the wandering-uterus theory" to be false (400). Just at this moment of advancing knowledge he says, "But there are indications that child-bearing capacities are compromised by too much thinking. . . . As vital energy is drawn away to support the intellect, the ovaries wither" (400). Mary ridicules, "Yes, I am nature, of the body, while you are culture, of the intellect. This creates, for women, a diabolical collapsing of physical function and social creation" (400). While the theories Everard initially

¹⁵² Griffiths discusses the reality of medical practice during this era in her essay, "In many cases, the insult to women went beyond the intellectual to the physical. Feminists charged that physicians used obstetrical examination as a cover for sexual abuse and the speculum as an instrument of torture. Abuses were legion. . . . Doctors were regularly complicit with husbands in concealing venereal disease—famously rampant in the Victorian Age" ("Flagrantly" 149). Once again, Griffiths's extensive historical and fictional research into the Victorian era provides her with a robust understanding of the period. However, her purpose for *Age of Arousal* is not to convey these facts but to tell a fictional narrative about women's lived experience. As such, the conversation between Mary, Rhoda, and Everard touches on these subjects without delving into them.

expresses have been long disproven and are therefore invalid in contemporary medicine the conversation turns to a much more widespread and difficult to abolish sexist understanding of gender performativity.

Griffiths depicts these characters as living in a time with which the audience may not be intimately familiar. Yet, their circumstances, thoughts, and experiences are often recognizable. Griffiths emphasizes her play with time in the first lines of her essay, “In *Age of Arousal*, time is collapsed, inverted, stomped on, in an effort to straddle important points in Britain’s struggle for women’s rights. It’s all true, just rearranged. The play is set in 1885. The time period that encompasses all aspects of the play is from 1869 to 1914. Forty-five years” (136). Accordingly, Griffiths subtitles this first section “Time Travel”. Later, “Even though I’ve reversed time in the play, I want to show what was happening before the word ‘suffragette’ was coined by the *Fleet Street Press* in 1906” (151).

Griffiths connects the women’s movement of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century with Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication for the Rights of Women*. The playwright argues in her historical essay: “if there is one date that signifies the official beginning of the European fight for women’s rights, it’s much earlier than 1869, when I chose to begin my timeline” pointing to Wollstonecraft’s text which was “[f]irst published in 1792. . . . When I first read Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication for the Rights of Women*, I cried. . . . I tried to imagine this woman, so isolated, so unusual, reaching forwards and backwards in time to articulate what women have known since the

Garden of Eden” (138).¹⁵³ Thus, Griffiths voices a visceral reaction when discussing her process of intellectualizing the piece.

This statement speaks to the innate knowledge these women uncover over the course of *Age of Arousal*. As Penny Farfan explores in “Ages of Arousal,” in *Age of Arousal*, “Griffiths represents a broader spectrum of sexual and gender identities” (31). Indeed, the play’s title suggests that arousal is sexual. While it references the age of the period, it also indicates the age of these women, who are undergoing awakening. They come to perceive and understand their plight, their hopes, and the audience witnesses their lives during a time of arousal personally, socially, politically, and sexually.

Griffiths similarly discusses her understanding of Victorian views on women’s sexuality in the “Womanly Graces” section of her historical essay:

The Victorians believed that women had achieved a preferred status in society, a gilded pedestal from which they watched the sordid doings of the male world.

Victorian women had been elevated to the position of ‘angel of the home’.

¹⁵³ Griffiths also argues that Wollstonecraft’s “extraordinary mind dealt with women’s rights in the context of human rights” (“Flagrantly” 138). She then quotes a long passage from *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*: “It is vain to expect virtue from women till they are in some degree independent of men; nay, it is vain to expect that strength of natural affection which would make them good wives and mothers. Whilst they are absolutely dependent on their husbands they will be cunning, mean, and selfish; and the men who can be gratified by the fawning fondness of spaniel-like affection have not much delicacy, for love is not to be bought; in any sense of the words, its silken wings are instantly shrivelled up when anything beside a return in kind is sought. Yet whilst wealth enervates me, and women live, as it were, by their personal charms, how can we expect them to discharge those ennobling duties which equally require exertion and self-denial?” (“Flagrantly” 138).

Imagine beautiful drawings of women in ringlets and regalia, a hint of wings, bending over the crib of a chubby child. (“Flagrantly” 140–41)

According to Shelley Scott, Griffiths here exposes “the contradictory Victorian attitudes about women’s sexuality. . . . She begins with the theory of separate spheres, the belief that woman is the ‘angel in the house’, exerting her influence in the private realm of running the home and raising the children, untouched by the violence and politics of the public world” (“Sickness and Sexuality” 47). Indeed, Griffiths connects this idealistic view of women with their sexuality, the “Angel of the home, all-powerful, all pure. Woman’s purity was also a societal construct to protect her from herself” (Griffiths, “Flagrantly” 141).

Psychologists have been calling such a consideration of women “benevolent sexism” since Glick and Fiske’s 1996 theory of Ambivalent Sexism, which is comprised of both hostile and benevolent sexism. While the former represents an overtly prejudicial view of women, the latter is defined “as a set of interrelated attitudes toward women that are sexist in terms of viewing women stereotypically and in restricted roles but are subjectively positive in feeling tone (for the perceiver) and also tend to elicit behaviors typically categorized as prosocial (e.g., helping) or intimacy-seeking (e.g., self-disclosure)” (Glick and Fiske 491).¹⁵⁴ Benevolent sexism’s “underpinnings lie in traditional stereotyping and masculine dominance (e.g., the man as the provider and

¹⁵⁴ This term harkens back to Griffiths’s removal of Mary’s “combining benevolence with business” from Gissing’s text, an example of prosocial behaviour (Gissing 22).

woman as his dependent), and its consequences are often damaging” (491–92).¹⁵⁵ In a play that deals with financial emancipation and the possibilities of an economic imbalance of power and control Griffiths delves into these women breaking free from traditional prescribed roles. As Virginia and Alice struggle to learn to type, Rhoda says, “*You want me to dominate the room, dominate the teaching, dominate you poor excuses for women, who remind me of every lacklustre female relative—*” (Griffiths, “Age of Arousal” 403). As these women in differing ways learn a skill, they also work towards financial emancipation. At the same time, by having their education focused on typing Griffiths builds in a theme of freedom found through writing as well as expressing one’s own voice and sexuality. We watch as the characters in this play express beliefs pertaining to benevolent sexism and ultimately realize their discomfort with such understandings of womanhood.

A later section in her historical essay’s section entitled, “Marriage,” Griffiths returns to her statement about intergenerational experiences of womanhood, “These are our ancestors. These long-forgotten laws continue to have an impact on us. Behaviours and beliefs echo for generations after, reverberating into the perfect condos of young married couples, sneaking into the air systems of family homes, polluting the atmosphere as we all attempt the oh-so-delicate balance of love, sex and the outside world” (“Flagrantly” 145). Therefore, what Griffiths creates in the intertwining of these varying explorations of historical women’s lived experience—their search for self, sexual

¹⁵⁵ My thanks to Dr. Katherine Jongsma for bringing this term to my attention.

freedom, financial independence, and learning to typewrite—connects to the contemporary moment.

Similarly, Shelley Scott quotes Sharon Pollock's review of *Age of Arousal*, "Sometimes there's an explosion of voices with all the women talking at once, which reminds me so much of the kitchen in my daughter's house with all my five daughters talking at once" ("Sickness and Sexuality" 41). What Pollock explains here is a recognition of her similar lived experience, which Scott calls "a familiarity that also resonated with reviewers (41). *Thoughtspeak* is a device that transports the spoken multifaceted reality of a woman's existence into the illusory performance, rather than excluding such content as messy and therefore unworthy of the stage. Karen Hines's discussion of directing *Age of Arousal* and managing the *thoughtspeak* likewise discloses her perception of an integral element this device imparts on the play that she did not find when reading the script, "The language was lush, the ideas sharp...and yet...where was that gorgeous mess; that oh-so-female chaos?" (2). The proliferation of women resonating with this element of *Age of Arousal*, yet looking at them from their own perspectives, connects with Griffiths's observations about the innate knowledge of "what women have known since the Garden of Eden" ("Flagrantly" 138).

In fact, a connection with the Angel in the house comes from Sherrill Grace's biography of Sharon Pollock, Griffiths's ancestor in Canadian theatre. Grace considers Virginia Woolf's "Professions for Women":

the most dangerous, undermining presence for a woman writer is not the literary or even the stage professions themselves, but the Angel in the house—this ‘intensely sympathetic’, ‘immensely charming’, ‘utterly unselfish’ creature who ‘never had a mind or a wish of her own’ (150). This creature haunted Virginia Woolf. The minute she took pen in hand, the Angel would flutter around warning: ‘Never let anyone guess you have a mind of your own’.

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Alice expresses a similar sentiment in *Age of Arousal*, “But the world is fuelled by the certain fact that women give. Forgive me, I am on the brink of a thought and it is making all my limbs itch, my arms and my ankles—no, keep the thought—I want tea, cake, gin, itching, I am cold, tired, keep the thought—” (Griffiths, “Age of Arousal” 414). As Alice struggles against these built-in cognitive responses to distract her from her own thoughts, Mary coaches, “Breathe from the stomach, control your mind—” her instruction enabling Alice to articulate, “You want us to stop giving and loving for no profit” (414).

This argument about the experience of womanhood and the presumptions placed upon women through benevolent sexism overtly states an ideological undercurrent found in *Age of Arousal*. In their *Ambivalent Sexism Inventory* Glick and Fiske deem the concepts of women being “set on a pedestal by her man” and “cherished and protected by men” as components of “Protective paternalism” (512). Alice, the eldest sister, seems to express the most overt view of women in this way. When she types she expresses the opposite, “*I am linked to these keys, to the miraculous pounding, the strength of them*

opening my mind, I can go more and more quickly and yet not lose the clarity of the print—” (Griffiths, “Age of Arousal” 413). Mary calls it “A spontaneous combustion of learning!” while Alice “*still typing*” says, “I am beginning to understand the glory of chastity—it isn’t the result of not being chosen, a void of negativity, but is part of nature’s plan—*if I am happy, I say the unthinkable, that the sex act is not a necessity for everyone, not a necessity for me*” (413). There are many instances in *Age of Arousal* which counter various sexist ideologies about women. Specifically, this typewriting theme connects with Griffiths’s ancestors of women writers who work to counter the idealization of women’s role in the home, which subverts her ability to express herself freely.

Not one of these women ends her journey of self-realization by marrying. As Rhoda lives through an experience of marriage proposal, she reveals to the audience the gap between spoken and internal reflections. Her character arc explores the lived reality of stepping out from underneath these “long-forgotten laws [that] continue to have an impact on us,” to requote Griffiths (Griffiths, “Flagrantly” 145). The audience watches Rhoda undergo both an external and internal re-cognizing of her understanding of women and of power dynamics in her relationships. Early in the play she becomes frustrated with the Madden sisters,

RHODA. I shouldn’t have invited them. Suddenly I hate them—

MARY. Then you hate women, then our struggle is for nothing.

RHODA. So sick of prompting and praising, only to have them put the shackles back on their own wrists.

MARY. Oh, don't be so daft. (Griffiths, "Age of Arousal" 398)

Mary insinuates with her reply what Griffiths states in her essay and what psychology has proven, that these ways of being and of understanding women are not as simple as the action of cognisant self-shackling.

Indeed, during "Gynecologist" Rhoda and Everard are introduced. Mary purposefully chose this venue to control their introduction, "*If she was going to meet my comely cousin, better in a borrowed office, an instrument of torture in his hand—*" (401). Despite Mary's efforts, Rhoda thinks about Everard, "*A comely man of thirty-five, the sight of him, the fact he is large, that I would feel small, that I could sink into him tiny and kept, protected and loved, I am spinning, spinning towards him—*" (402).¹⁵⁶ Rhoda has declared herself "ferociously odd" and she counters the effects of benevolent sexism on the Madden sisters. Yet, Rhoda experiences an instinctive yearning for protection (396).

Penny Farfan describes a certain "something uncomfortable" felt with regards to "Griffiths's choice in *Age of Arousal* to represent Mary and Rhoda as lovers only to have Rhoda find Mary to be not quite enough in the face of Everard's masculine sex appeal

¹⁵⁶ This same contradictory thought process occurs in the first scene of act II, when Everard remarks upon her demeanour and she baldly replies, "Of course I'm not happy. What woman above the level of a petted pussycat is happy?" (Griffiths, "Age of Arousal" 412). "*Never to work again, to see the world with a man on my arm—no, I would be on his arm—*" (Griffiths, "Age of Arousal" 413).

(“Playwright’s Note” 19; *Age of Arousal* 103), of which she becomes aware in the course of Griffiths’s invented scene of his gynecological examination of Mary, and then to have Mary tacitly threaten to exercise her class privilege and economic power over Rhoda in order to hold on to her as a lover, thus killing Rhoda’s desire for her entirely” (31).¹⁵⁷ Indeed, Monica tells Rhoda: “You’re protected by Miss Barfoot—she is the husband and you are the wife” (Griffiths, “Age of Arousal” 406). The power dynamic between Mary and Rhoda, due to their unequally distributed power over the school, leads the latter to end their relationship.

Griffiths follows this relationship with Rhoda’s romance with Everard, but it too proves disproportionate in its power dynamic. Before their tryst on vacation, Everard tells Rhoda, “I believe you to be my equal—do you realize the enormity of that admission?” (412). However, in “Seascale” we witness “*EVERARD and RHODA lolll[ing] on a picnic blanket*” and their conversation about how to proceed comes through dialogue interspersed with *thoughtspeak* (419). Initially Everard proposes the possibility of living “‘as’ man and wife” of which Rhoda considers, “*I announce that I have refused*

¹⁵⁷ Farfan here seems to be referring first to Rhoda’s character note that concludes, “she should still indicate a sensuality that is bubbling beneath and has been partially satisfied with Mary” (Griffiths, “Playwright’s Note” 19). The second citation points to part of “Three Virgins and the Moon” in which Mary and Rhoda speak about their relationship,

MARY. You have had love.

RHODA. A wonderful love.

MARY. Passion,

RHODA. But not—

MARY. Penetration? (Griffiths, *Age of Arousal* 101)

At which point Rhoda, Mary, and Virginia go on to speak about a potential proposal from Everard. Other than a small punctuation change, the 2007 and 2011 published script texts are the same at this point.

marriage, live openly with a man, how noble, how emancipated” yet also realizes “*but without a public promise, I could be abandoned without a thought—*” (419). When she confirms her love for him openly he “*slips a ring on RHODA’s marriage finger,*” which alters the course of their future (419). She finds that the reality of wearing a fake ring “for convention” will not do: “this proves to me I cannot pretend” (419).

Hines says that at this moment in performance “thoughtspeak [sic] was delivered almost mouth-to-mouth, with utter physical intimacy during which the actor’s shifts happened within themselves in a kind of privacy that drew upon, but was in no way slave to, the rules of Act One” (16).¹⁵⁸ “In each other’s arms” yet with *thoughtspeak* revealing the beginning of their separation, Everard and Rhoda expose both their feelings for one another and their inner quandary about how to balance their relationship (16). Rhoda repeats for him, “Dearest—*See how well I do it, like any woman, / like an ordinary woman with all her wretched wiles—*” while Everard, having requested this, is unhappy with her obeisance, “Come here. *Do I love her less?* Let me dominate you in this at least” and stage directions detail, “*They kiss, but less passionately than before*” (Griffiths, “Age of Arousal” 420). Confused and with a sense of remaining undecided, their conversation is interrupted by the arrival of a letter about Monica’s pregnancy and with claims about the child’s paternity.

¹⁵⁸ Hines includes their conversation from Rhoda’s “More than a ring. Dearest, Everard dearest—” until Everard’s “Yielding at the very beginning of the war” (16-17).

“*RHODA and EVERARD remain onstage*” while the other four characters attend “*a meeting*” that ends with Alice penning the note the couple just received (420). This deviation from chronology ensures the audience gains information about Everard’s relationship to the child at the same time as Rhoda. At this moment we, like Rhoda, only have Alice’s word since Monica never overtly states who the father is; Alice assumes “Monica is pregnant and we believe the father is Everard Barfoot,” later stating “It is Everard’s” (420). However, Monica leaves Mary’s inquiry unanswered: “Monica, is it that you don’t know who the father is? . . . Do you know? Then who is it?” (420). Everard denies the information, but refuses an explanation, “You must trust me” he tells Rhoda (421). Once again, the play explains nothing; we only witness Rhoda’s experience.

The action jumps five months ahead when Monica arrives at Mary’s home “*seven months pregnant*” and admits to Rhoda “It wasn’t Everard” (421). Even so, when he returns they have an entire conversation in *thoughtspeak*. When Everard imagines being able to return “*to that day in Seascale*” Rhoda does not allow him to idealize their conversation which leads to him exclaiming with frustration “DO NOT TOY WITH ME! I ask for the last time, will you marry me?” (422). “*This is the man for me, made and unmade for me—*” thinks Rhoda before replying:

I am not a very rapid typist. If you typewrite at high speeds, there comes a time when you can’t comprehend the words, you must surrender to the physical movement and become an automation. When this occurs, I always become

afraid. I deliberately stop, even stumble, so that my brain will catch up and I am able to understand. There is wonder in the surrender and pain in the stopping, but only then am I fully conscious. I will always remember that day. . . . Even now, I have just enough courage left to send you on your way. (422)

The audience learns through the expression of Rhoda's thoughts that if she were to marry, Everard would be her match. What she expresses through typewriting explains why she cannot. By describing an "automation" she considers remaining with Everard in a traditional marriage as an unconscious writing of one's own life—accepting and living out domestic expectations. Rhoda teaches us that in enacting the alternative, stopping to allow for pause to cognize and move forward intentionally, "only then" can one be "fully conscious" (422). She lives out, with the courage she feared would be lacking, the decision to write her life consciously.

"Three months later. Bright sunlight floods a garden outside a country house. ALICE is holding a baby. MARY sits beside her. VIRGINIA behind them, dashingy dressed in men's clothing" (422). Griffiths explains to me her imagination of how this scene concludes the play, "Every production has managed to create this garden at the end . . . with the light and the women wearing light clothes. And the sense of, you know, the funeral is over and the baby is there, and a baby is always going to mean hope" (Griffiths, *Interview*). "The Garden" concludes *Age of Arousal* with an idyllic moment in which hope is envisioned for future generations. Monica dies during childbirth, but very significantly her baby carries her name and Alice finally becomes a parent, which she has

long wanted, “Yes, she definitely agrees with me. . . . I love to watch her eyes as she drinks” she tells Mary (Griffiths, “Age of Arousal” 422).

Each woman’s journey concludes during this scene with a sense of having found a way to partially appease her desires and find herself. For example, Virginia stops drinking: “The only way I can keep off the bottle is to dress like a man. It fortifies me in a very deep and superficial way” (422). But she can only dress as a man at home. Likewise, Mary tells Alice, “Rhoda is no longer an apprentice but a business partner. She now owns half of our enterprise,” although neither woman has successfully established a romantic relationship with equal power dynamics (423). In *thoughtspeak* Virginia wonders: “*Lovers?*” to which Rhoda responds “*No longer. We’re doing so well, we have to purchase a larger building. And we are beginning a women’s publishing house*” (423). As they stand and imagine what the future may hold these women imagine such potentialities for equality. “Once [Monica]’s older,” says Alice, “we’ll finally become business women and open a school for young children. We’ll call it Day Time Care” (423).

In the final moments Rhoda predicts, “In 30 years it will all be accomplished” (423). The power and hope, yet obviously erroneous message, of this statement reverberates with the audience. Likewise, Rhoda says of baby Monica, “She won’t have to typewrite” (423). In fact, women still in the twenty-first century work towards gaining equality with men in the fields of writing and publishing. As discussed in the Introduction, women’s presence in most roles in Canadian theatres remain unequal to

men's and Griffiths herself has been on the cusp of her plays being left "out there in oral-history land" (Rudakoff 15). And yet, Griffiths tells me, "I also think theatre is hope, so, there's also that. The act of theatre is hope" (Griffiths, *Interview*). Generations have created lasting change, and in "[t]he act of theatre" Griffiths sees more "hope" on the horizon, as do these women who "*form a loose tableau*" and the stage directions depict their final moments on stage: "*The lights dim very slowly...Until finally...The women disappear*" (Griffiths, "Age of Arousal" 423).

In the apparatus to *Age of Arousal* a personal note appears in a section on "Pre-Militancy," "As I read about the Yorkshire and Lancashire women's participation I couldn't help feeling a rush of genetic pride" (Griffiths, "Flagrantly" 151). Published in 2007, *Age of Arousal*'s process overlaps with that of Griffiths's overtly autobiographical play, *The Last Dog of War*. While researching and writing *Age of Arousal* Griffiths is also undergoing a search for her roots. This is made even more meaningful once we have the metaphorical understanding of this powerful play about typewriting as a way to find financial security and self-expression. In *Age of Arousal* she creates the literary masterpiece of her career through her writerly self. Its success lies in the balance Griffiths continues to find between process, working through her actor-playwright identity, creating literary nuance in the script, and her innate understanding of her audience.

4.2 *The Last Dog of War*: Linda Griffiths as Linda Griffiths

Speaking as “Linda,” the solo character in *The Last Dog of War*, Linda Griffiths begins each performance with a direct address to the audience: “This isn’t the story I set out to tell. That’s the dilemma. I’ve always taken my dilemmas to the theatre—I really think it’s the only place where I’ve ever learned anything” (3). This play occurs near the untimely end of Griffiths’s career. Clearly, she did indeed take many of her personal dilemmas to the theatre. Her plays bear traces of Griffiths’s personal inspiration that I explore thanks to the archival traces available in the Linda Griffiths *fonds* as well as material and input from those in her community.

Griffiths has a spiritual connection to theatre creation which entails an understanding that while it is a fiction it can also have visceral impact. My chapter, “‘This Isn’t the Story I Set out to Tell’: World War II, Process, and Autobiography in Linda Griffith’s *The Last Dog of War*” in *Linda Griffiths* (2018) articulates the nature of this impact by tracing the development of her autobiographical play: “Her initial impulse to create *The Last Dog of War* related not only to her career-long focus on process, but also her tendency to write plays starring non-fictional characters. This concern developed on multiple levels, both historical and personal” (88). I argue that Griffiths’s autobiographical portrait emerges through her improvisational process and “with the audience play[ing] a key role in this evolution” (86–87). In my analysis of the final moments of the play I conclude: “Linda then speaks honestly in her final line when she reveals, ‘It’s not war that I love,’” which insinuates a found affection for her father and

ends the play with an affectionate gaze (101). I argue that in this moment Linda is “directly addressing her family, her audience, with a genuine moment of self-performance and concluding a play whose process chronicles her creation of this autobiographical self” (101). Yet, in the same collection Daniel MacIvor, Griffiths’s collaborator/dramaturge/director/buddy for *The Last Dog of War*, contradicts my reading of this text by detailing that he “had insisted on a tone of reconciliation at the end of the tale. . . . She fought me on it because it [this tone of reconciliation] wasn’t accurate, but I was adamant that we needed emotional closure, narrative. . . . She indulged me, but she always knew it wasn’t true” (“Who Is She?” 84).

Studying the kaleidoscopic nature of Griffiths’s career and the manifold archival traces available surrounding her plays I have discovered that truthfulness is more nuanced and complicated than the act of Griffiths speaking as Linda. The closest I can get to an explication is a different moment in *The Last Dog of War* when Linda visits a war memorial with her father, cousin Wilf, and Wilf’s wife Elizabeth (Griffiths, *Last Dog* 39). In the beginning of the play Linda brings the audience into the performance as her family, “I would like for you to become my family for the next eighty minutes—we kind of adopt each other” and makes our inclusion mandatory, “if you don’t want to be my relative for the next seventy-five minutes, we’ll lead you out of here, you’ll get your money back, and there will be no recriminations. *She waits for a while*. Thank you” (5). We, the audience, experience the narrative of the play as her family. Thus we arrive at the memorial with her.

She performs as her father, “LINDA cocks her head, grins, and bends over on one leg, one arm on her waist, in a class dashing flyer pose,” while also describing a photo that remains in the Linda Griffiths *fonds*, “He smiles. There is a glint in his eye that is irrefutably present. The handsome young bastard that he was” (Griffiths, *Personal Photos*; Griffiths, *Last Dog* 39). “I take the picture. *Flash*” reads the script before Linda tells the audience “But then, you, my family. You know that. You were there” (40). I observe that “a camera flash comes from behind the audience” without noting that my knowledge of the evolution of this lighting decision comes from the experience of watching recordings of performances available in her *fonds* (101).¹⁵⁹ Exactly so, this moment that Griffiths creates with both her text and its performance enacts intimacy that rests upon her presence and her methods of acknowledging we are also there, that we are also an important part of the “act of theatre” (Griffiths, *Interview*).

At the SOULO festival in 2014 she describes *The Last Dog of War* as “storytelling,” as are her imaginings of the first instances of theatre, saying early in the talk:

I have perhaps a romantic idea, but it may be true, of how these things began. So, you can imagine this cave and a group of people are sitting around . . . and somebody talks. And they say, “Wow, woolly mammoth coming to charge, couldn’t do anything” . . . and somebody else comes in and starts talking and

¹⁵⁹ These archival video recordings in the Linda Griffiths *fonds* of *The Last Dog of War* can be found in Box 18 file 4, Box 19 file 6-10, Box 20 file 2-3, Box 20 file 10, and Box 35 file 8, as well as mini recorder tapes in Box 36, file 5.

goes “88-hour birth . . . giving rise to this beautiful child who is now a major person in this tribe.” Somebody else starts talking about the longest, foulest farts that were ever emitted by anyone in this tribe. Someone talks about a death. The life of a leader. And it is so basic, so true, so human you have to wonder: 30,000 years may not even touch the first time somebody started talking. And theatre comes out of that initial thing. You could call it storytelling, you could call it the urge to share, to show off, to have people watch you. It’s primal, it’s immediate, and it’s social. (*5 Solo Shows*)

One might challenge this, but when Griffiths discusses *The Last Dog of War* here she describes it as “an example of how the minute you say something it becomes untrue. . . . The minute you write it, even if it’s ‘I am going to write the absolute truth’. . . . The minute you write it down it’s not actually true. It’s something else. . . . It becomes something else, it becomes a story” (*5 Solo Shows*).

Perhaps the “something else” that enables Linda Griffiths to create meaningful, impactful, hopeful theatre is the moment of shared experience she so adeptly creates. I think the something else is the power of her presence. On this point MacIvor might agree: “In performance Linda’s presence usurped any need for narrative. She was the narrative. Her awareness of our presence, and of her presence with us. Her awareness of being watched. Of not being in the room alone. Of the truth of the lie” (“Who Is She?” 81).

Chapter 5 Linda's Legacy

HE. History is important.
SHE. Is it?
—Linda Griffiths, *Heaven 7*

Linda Griffiths is a truly unique and indomitable theatre practitioner who began working in collective creation and remained a playwright and actor until her passing in 2014. *The Theatre of Linda Griffiths* is founded on the published texts of Griffiths's fourteen plays, many of which are now out of print. *Baby Finger* (2006) and *Heaven Above, Heaven Below* (2013) have yet to be published. As Daniel MacIvor suggests in *New Magic Valley Fun Town* (2020), the readership of plays is a complicated matter.¹⁶⁰ The limited interest in reading “a theatre thing,” of selling a playscript in book form, obviously impacts the possibility of publishing scripts (MacIvor, *New Magic Valley Fun Town* 81). But the continuing accessibility of plays such as Griffiths's is an important factor for the legacy of theatre artists.

¹⁶⁰ In fact, the conversation includes a veiled reference to Griffiths's *Alien Creature*:

SANDY. My thesis was to be on the poet Gwendolyn MacEwen and the mystic arts as related to her earlier work.

ALLEN. Okay, I've seen some stuff on that.

SANDY. Well if there's anything out there on it I've read it.

ALLEN. This was a theatre thing.

SANDY. Really? That's so interesting. (MacIvor, *New Magic Valley Fun Town* 81)

Theatre is a live event that is connected to the present moment and current events. Griffiths last performs in *Heaven Above, Heaven Below*, which premieres in the Backspace of Theatre Passe Muraille on November 17, 2013, with Linda Griffiths as SHE and Layne Coleman as HE.¹⁶¹ Her career comes full circle as she returns to the Backspace of Theatre Passe Muraille, to perform with long-time companion, friend, partner Layne Coleman, and to write through her lived experience. The sequel to *The Darling Family, Heaven Above, Heaven Below* takes its title from a conversation between SHE and HE from the precursor:

SHE. Let's go throw the I Ching...

...

HE. The Image is "Heaven above, heaven below." How do you know what it means?

SHE. *It means either way heaven. Either way. But I can't tell him that.*

(Griffiths, "Darling" 163)

Returning to this point to reconsider it, SHE and HE arrive on stage having met at a mutual friend's wedding.

While consuming various substances, SHE and HE embark on another conversational journey, revisiting the now titular concern and exploring whether it was

¹⁶¹ *Games: Who Wants to Play?* premieres in the spring of 2014, but Griffiths is not in the production. Shelley Scott's "Game Development: Linda Griffiths's *Games: Who Wants to Play?*" in *Linda Griffiths* provides fascinating detail surrounding the process of creation and production of this play (Scott, "Game Development"). The script was published in 2016.

heaven either way. In *The Darling Family* SHE ultimately chooses abortion, which she feels is best for her life. Now as adults SHE and HE have a lengthy discussion about the decision to become parents, or not. SHE ultimately concludes “I used to believe there were no wrong choices and I’m still not sure about that one. Heaven Above, Heaven Below. Now I think that’s a child’s understanding of it all. Now I think real life is the prayer. *Small pause. A breath*” (Griffiths, *Heaven* 51). As Andy McKim writes, “With this play we are taken into the heart of a debate about choice. Big choices in life, like whether we want to partner, or whether we want to raise children” (“A Note from Andy”).

Throughout the play SHE and HE also contemplate how their present has been affected by their past decisions. At times they even speak fictional lines about true moments in Griffiths’s career. When SHE suggests smoking pot HE makes a veiled retort about not wanting to “set off the smoke alarm and have the police up here” (Griffiths, *Heaven* 15).¹⁶² The actor playing HE, Layne Coleman, was one of the actors accused of smoking pot on stage in *O.D. on Paradise*, which indeed provoked a visit from police enforcement to Theatre Passe Muraille. With this knowledge, this moment becomes rife with both subtext and intertext. They also have a conversation about thievery, harkening back to the concept as discussed in *The Book of Jessica*:

HE. You’re a stealer.

¹⁶² Since *Heaven Above, Heaven Below* has yet to be published, I refer to the performance script from December 2013 as “*Heaven*” in parenthetical citations and mark the script from January 2012 with the date.

SHE. I am not.

HE. You used to say that. About yourself. That you stole. (11)

These small moments of personal recollection are hiding in a beautiful, fictional play. SHE and HE speak about kitchen renovations, past choices, and how history affects the future. Griffiths as a playwright reconsiders and reimagines history multiple times as well as questions historical truth and the ephemeral nature of theatre. These moments of truth hidden in fiction continue her career-long exploration of the possibilities of art.

A heartbreaking wisp of Griffiths's present truth remains. HE speaks about "the old days," when SHE "would have said [them] bumping into each other was a *sign*" that such thinking has become trendy because his "friends are suddenly reading too much into signs and sending energy into the universe . . . it's a version of, 'positive thinking will cure your cancer'" (Griffiths, *Heaven Jan 2012* 13). In earlier drafts of the script, SHE replies: "Yeah. Cancer. *Silence*" (Griffiths, *Heaven Jan 2012* 13). By the premiere, however, SHE no longer responds to HE's monologue, which ends with this comment about cancer: "*Pause*" (Griffiths, *Heaven* 14).

"Last fall [2013], with breast cancer that had metastasized to her liver, Griffiths acted in her final play, *Heaven Above, Heaven Below*, so weak from chemotherapy that she had to have anti-nausea pills hidden all over the stage" (Timson). Griffiths, acting onstage as SHE, chooses in this loaded moment not to respond to HE's discussion of cancer, which connects with her real-life health concerns during the production of this

play.¹⁶³ *Heaven Above, Heaven Below* premiered and ran concurrently with Griffiths's chemotherapy treatments. Layne Coleman in his contribution to *Linda Griffiths*, the only scholarly book dedicated entirely to Griffiths's work, reproduces a piece of his writing from the fall of 2013: "Linda has cancer and I know where this is going. She does too, but she doesn't want to talk about it, so we won't" (Coleman, "Stage Time" 142). And yet, in her personal papers Griffiths leaves many traces of her cancer for researchers like me to find posthumously.¹⁶⁴

One instance of *Heaven Above, Heaven Below* is the only time I had the privilege of experiencing Griffiths perform live. These real-life circumstances were invisible to me, the unknowing spectator. In fact, my most vivid recollection of the performance is when Linda and Layne stepped out onto a part of the staircase in the spectators' seating area, as if it were the hotel's balcony (*Heaven Above, Heaven Below*). The power of their presence as they shared space with the audience was unforgettable.

5.1 Theatre Magic and Visceral Playwrighting

Linda's legacy is just that: theatre magic. Hers is an innate talent that she develops while maintaining deep responsibility for her subjects and an abiding connection to her

¹⁶³ Due to Griffiths's illness, lifelong friend Nicky Guadagni trains as the understudy for this play. Yet another demonstration of her will, Griffiths performs as SHE throughout the run of *Heaven Above, Heaven Below* despite her difficult cancer treatments. Guadagni steps in as SHE for only one performance (Coleman, *Interview with Layne Coleman, July 2021*).

¹⁶⁴ "Upside Down," for example, is three pages of explicit documentation of her journey through the treatment of her cancer (Griffiths, *Upside Down* 1–3).

audience. With intense charisma, presence, and dedication, she creates beautifully connective performances from the transformations of her lived experience and through her body, even when these fundamental elements are veiled. “What Canada has lost with the death of Linda Griffiths” (to quote the title of one of her obituaries) is encapsulated in *Heaven Above, Heaven Below* (Ouzounian). Her reliance upon discovery in process developed a unique method of creation with its emphasis on collaboration and community. Her willful preservation of archival traces pertaining to this process prove to be the Rosetta Stone to understanding her kaleidoscopic plays.

In this dissertation on her career, the first of its kind, I reposition Linda Griffiths in the field of Canadian theatre. In tracing her transformations between actor and playwright I also articulate the nature of her alignment with Theatre Passe Muraille throughout her career. Griffiths uses her voice, her presence, and her artistic identity as actor-playwright to create many important plays for and with her theatre community, which in turn often lead to events and moments that transcend the live moment of performance. As she develops her own theatre she reconsiders women’s representation and reimagines women’s self-representation by addressing, opposing, and revising the presumptions placed upon women. Ultimately, she creates her own theatrical device called *thoughtspeak*, a new way to express a woman’s inner voice and lived experience on the stage, thereby representing her continued feminist efforts to make the private public and to create and embody characters in their entirety.

Griffiths represents the arc of a Canadian playwright who finds her home at Theatre Passe Muraille, “her first love,” in Layne Coleman’s words (Coleman, *Interview with Layne Coleman, July 2021*). She writes *Maggie & Pierre* with Paul Thompson as a textual transformation of their collaborative process, the script being created through Griffiths the actor. As Theatre Passe Muraille transitions from a collective emphasis towards scripted plays, she creates *O.D. on Paradise*. When Theatre Passe Muraille and many theatres across Toronto face financial difficulties Griffiths, too, turns to creating small plays with low production costs. *The Darling Family* needs only two actors on a bare stage. *A Game of Inches*, a solo show, runs as a benefit for the theatre and seizes the opportunity to use the play’s baseball themes to ramp up concession sales and increase fundraising. *Spiral Woman and the Dirty Theatre* premieres during the 25th anniversary celebrations, *The Duchess* during the 30th anniversary season. With *The Duchess* Griffiths begins a new phase of her career that leads to her two most lauded and transformative pieces: *Alien Creature* and *Age of Arousal*. At the same time, her connection to the audience fills houses and sells tickets, which greatly helps Theatre Passe Muraille financially during incredibly trying times.

Existing studies on alternative theatre in Canada continue to depict this history as a linear evolution or to reanalyze the movement from a contemporary vantage. In this in-depth study of Griffiths, I necessarily opt not to claim writing this history, but instead study the messiness of a career in Canadian theatre. As Griffiths writes in *Spiral Woman and the Dirty Theatre*, “There are a million stories in the Dirty Theatre, this is merely one

of them” (Griffiths, *Spiral* 39). Likewise, she believes that in collective creations the performers are “physically and vocally creating characters for the theatre. A visceral, not a literary process” and she “think[s] this is why collective creations are so misunderstood in academic circles” (Griffiths, “Thief” 304).

These two statements guided me throughout the writing of this dissertation. Her visceral connection to the theatre and to creating for the theatre ensure a legacy that is both obvious in her contributions and the shows that continue to be hits yet is also so much bigger and meaningful to the theatre community than can possibly be held in the archives. I attempted to understand Griffiths’s career by first listening to her through various sources—archival, published materials, and through conversations with Layne Coleman; I believe this method avoided minimizing or misunderstanding the visceral nature of her work.

Griffiths’s letter of resignation as Artistic Director is included in the “Artistic Leaders” section of *Theatre Passe Muraille: A Collective History*.¹⁶⁵ Her letter concerns the polar energy of “abuse and love,” both of which she feels she has received in her time with the theatre (Griffiths, “Resignation” 48, 49). The letter, in fact, became “famous” in the Theatre Passe Muraille community (Coleman, *Interview with Layne Coleman, July 2021*). Dated with a shrewd wit, “April Fool’s, 1987” which is written under a crossed-out “March 30, 1987,” the letter is addressed to the Manager of the theatre (Griffiths,

¹⁶⁵ Griffiths also serves as co-Artistic Director, “an artistic triumvirate,” of 25th Street House Theatre with Layne Coleman and Andras Tahn (Brenna 161).

“Resignation” 48). Griffiths writes: “I have dared to offer a little philosophy, a hopefully small amount of griping, and quite a bit of history to explain my decision” (48). She gives the history of being asked to take on this leadership position in the theatre: “When Clarke Rogers demanded that I officially become a member of the theatre, I asked him that the word, ‘director’, not be part of my title, but found later that I was to be called an Artistic Director” (49). Despite her “resistance to this title” Griffiths has a sense of having “actually bec[o]me an artistic director” and therefore feels she “can resign as someone who has actively rendered that service to the theatre” (49).

Griffiths acknowledges “the love and encouragement” the theatre grants her, but also states “for every moment of that love, there now seems to be an overloaded balance of gift giving that I am no longer able or willing to give” (49-50). Griffiths lands upon her gift in the theatre community: her work “at the theatre as an actor or writer,” calling these her “true functions” (51). She concludes her letter with a final inseverable connection to Theatre Passe Muraille: “I will always consider myself, officially or unofficially, to be one of the loose community to whom the theatre is a beacon of hope, art and anarchy. And abuse. And love” (53). This letter and these details express the conditions surrounding the productions of her plays that are not found with the published scripts; these details remain amongst the traces that have been archived and through conversations about Griffiths’s memory in the community.

Turning the page from Griffiths’s letter, the gaze of the reader falls upon a photo of Griffiths and Coleman onstage together in a still from *Heaven Above, Heaven Below*

(Coleman, “The Minister of Optimism” 48). Griffiths smiles, holding a drink in her right hand and having her left arm outstretched with her hand tilted up. Coleman is caught mid-laugh, bending forward from his seated position to place his glass on the table between them. The backspace of Theatre Passe Muraille has been transformed into a hotel room, a bed and hotel art behind them and a half-unwrapped pineapple on the table between them, a prop signifying the wedding favour HE and SHE received at the mutual event that led to their reconnection. Layne Coleman writes his contribution in the article that this photo heads, “The Minister of Optimism,” to the “Artistic Leaders” section of *Theatre Passe Muraille: A Collective History* (54-59). He writes that “TPM is many things—it is the home theatre of Linda Griffiths and the tribe of Paul Thompson, and as an ark of nationalism it would be tragic to forget its glories” (55). His reference to Linda’s importance to the theatre is but one amongst the book’s multiple mentions of her.

“Linda Griffiths’s untimely death was mourned by all in the theatre community,” recalls Andy McKim about her contributions to the theatre: “Linda was an insightful visionary and provocative artist who was involved in more productions at Theatre Passe Muraille than most any other artist” (66). Theatre Passe Muraille reciprocated her sense of being an “artistic leader” as well as these immense contributions to the theatre with two places of memorialization. The first is the “Linda Griffiths’s Stairwell” where she was once told she could no longer smoke, but “exasperated with the discussion . . . she shut down the debate with an unassailable assertion: ‘Yes, well, this is my staircase’” (66). The second is “Linda Griffiths Lane” (*Her Night*). Daniel MacIvor writes in “Who

Is She? A Subjective Assemblage on Linda G.” that Linda Griffiths is in his perception an avatar for Toronto, listing various places that at once represent her and hold memories for many theatre artists. He concludes, “she is probably most of all Theatre Passe Muraille. Because that is where they’ve put her name on a lane where drunkards and poets gather” (“Who Is She?” 81). These places and the recollections of those close to Griffiths hold her memory and the force of her continuing presence in Theatre Passe Muraille and Canadian theatre communities.

Diamond writes in “Performance in the Archives” that “While our performance studies scholarship has annexed the archive to the hegemonic written record of history, and has aligned performance to the deep continuities of social memory or the embodied repertoire, certain historians have decisively crossed and intertwined these vortices and taken performance to the archive” (“Performance in the Archives” 21). I discovered through praxis in the process of writing and researching for this dissertation the incredible richness that grows from analysis imbued in the excesses and remains of performance. Griffiths’s work demands analysis at numerous intersections due to the multivalent nature of her plays and her creative process. One cannot adequately attend to the richness of her work without considering all aspects that this dissertation uncovers, from her reliance upon discovery in process, her careful curation of the entire performance event, to each play’s interaction with the theatre community, Canadian culture, and/or historical and serious subjects. For example, Griffiths recalls in *The Book of Jessica* a moment of intense connectivity with Campbell: “As we held each other, it

was as if I'd unleashed my own memories. Not a story, or even acting, but something else" (Griffiths and Campbell, *Book of Jessica* 46).

Indeed, a "something else" quality pervades Griffiths's canon. Of course, theatre is an ephemeral artform. The present moment of live performance remained of utmost importance to Griffiths. Yet she also championed her work, ensuring she preserved and documented the immense amount of toil she put into each script. Unique to Griffiths is her creative process and her distinct ability to intermingle process and product—the performative process of creation with the final script. She continually relies upon discovery in process, with performance and text impacting one another. In studying her archival traces we can watch, through documents, photographic images, and videos of live events, how she creates impactful art. This "expansive generous energy" of presence becomes infused into the product through process and remains in the scripts and archival traces.¹⁶⁶ The theatre of Linda Griffiths transforms the moment of live performance into an efficacious event that is indeed an artful mix of truth and lies, or perhaps neither, but nonetheless galvanizing.

The bodies in the theatre space find themselves in a moment of their lives to participate in an illusory performance. Nothing tangible remains, but Griffiths in *Alien*

¹⁶⁶ This quote comes from a talk she gave for the Humphrey Group entitled, "The Presence of a Leader.": "Through my years of teaching with the Humphrey Group, I've learnt it's not only in the theatre that a compelling presence is necessary but that it's also essential in the corporate world. . . . Especially when we're speaking of women and leadership" (1). The handwritten note about presence, to me, signifies an important thought about presence as critical element of her craft: "I'm hoping to use everything I have at my disposal to galvanize the audience" (1).

Creature solidifies her belief of an after-image remaining in a spectator's field of vision. Of course, this after-image is invisible to anyone but the spectator; a remnant for each person present in the moment with Griffiths. This perception of the remaining impactful nature of otherwise ephemeral theatre pairs with the concept of nothingness that builds within Griffiths during *Jessica*. Once she steps into her own stories by creating *The Darling Family*, *A Game of Inches*, and *Spiral Woman and the Dirty Theatre* she begins to develop a deeper sense of her own artistic identity while evolving a distinct creative process. This process is a combination of her roots in collective creation, which grew with energy from her innate talent. Even deeper from this is her dedication to her audience, her community, and her responsibility to her subjects.

Understanding her process for each play in turn affects my analysis of the text. Griffiths wonders: "If imagination is a gift, then isn't process, the working out of imagination, also a gift?" ("Process?" 61). Her work demonstrates the discoveries that can be possible by allowing an artist to explore the expansive depths of her imagination. Having worked on *Age of Arousal* for years with differing methods and with the help of director Karen Hines, Griffiths finds a way to make characters' private thoughts public through the creation of her own theatrical device called *thoughtspeak*. The ultimate example is how Griffiths discovers this *thoughtspeak* device in process by playing at multiple stages throughout her career with ways that enables characters to express inner experience. Even more, the play's reimagination and memorialization of the women who

fought for freedom during the suffrage movement draws inspiration and empowerment from her ancestors and for contemporary women.

Griffiths strives throughout her career to play women, to give each one the chance to voice her own story aloud. In her plays, Griffiths will not let the central women figures be forgotten. She embodies strong women, creates whole characters, bringing them (back) to life and providing each one with an opportunity to represent herself to the audience. In *Age of Arousal* Griffiths centres the emancipation of women around this potentiality to create herself. Performance is an illusory medium, but don't we all represent ourselves in one way or another? At times by choice, at others by making ourselves into something expected of us? Griffiths in her plays refuses the presumptions placed upon women and enacts new ways to create the self through both text and performance. Griffiths rewrites elements of the residual sexism of our contemporary society. By returning to the representation of historical women yet calling *Age of Arousal* a "contemporary play set in the past" Griffiths memorializes the beginnings of women refusing presumptions placed upon them and rewriting gender expectations (Griffiths, "Playwright's Note" 18). She therefore reimagines the possibilities available in women's representation and to women voicing themselves. This career-long exploration culminates in the creation of *thoughtspeak*. Griffiths's search for innovation, for revealing and uncensoring her women characters, and for uplifting her audience leaves us a lasting legacy.

Canadian theatre lost an outspoken, fiery voice and an artist dedicated to her craft. One fabulous, and thoroughly entertaining example is her letter to the editor that was published in the *Toronto Star* on March 8, 1981:

On Jan. 26, I received the Dora Mavor Moore Award for outstanding performance and outstanding new play, *Maggie & Pierre*. As I was on tour in Calgary, I asked the director to make a short speech for me.

It went like this: 'I feel uncomfortable with the whole idea of winning and losing in the theatre and am certain there are many people here who feel the same way. But this is one parade I don't want to rain on, as the theatre does need focus and I respect the choices made by the directors. Therefore I accept with thanks in the hope we may find a more equitable way to applaud'.

I arrived back to find Gina Mallet had given me the Marlon Brando/Kate Lynch Award for Self-Righteousness, and had reported that I 'deplored all awards'.

What I deplore is a theatrical community in which actors, directors and writers are afraid to have an opinion, or express a point of view for fear of this kind of irresponsible, cute, viciousness.

I accept the Self-Righteousness Award with thanks and humility, I happen to like the Company. ("Actress Says Thanks")

Griffiths holds steadfast beliefs in theatre's ability to express varying perspectives. She also hopes that the theatre can search for equitable celebration of new work. Finally,

Griffiths defends the community against attacks such as this one. She was no stranger to bad press, demonstrating great strength in speaking out against this opponent to the development of Canadian theatre.

5.2 Coda: Necessity of Repetition with a Difference

Linda Griffiths's kaleidoscopic plays that invite the audience to reconsider various overlapping subjects, ideologies, and perceived truths continue to receive remounts. Her charismatic presence is missed. But her plays and influence remain. She was furthermore supportive of the Canadian artistic community in ways I have not been able to explore during this study. For example, in addition to running informal salons in her home, she also developed a community of fellow artists throughout her career, as seen in the early years through her work with Paul Thompson and Sandra Balcovske and in the later years by the partnering with Karen Hines and Daniel MacIvor (Coleman, *Interview with Layne Coleman, July 2021*). Additionally, she worked with incredible theatre icons such as Iris Turcott, whose involvement with *Heaven Above, Heaven Below* helped to ensure Griffiths did not abandon the piece (Coleman, *Interview with Layne Coleman, July 2021*). Indeed, an infinite number of details are omitted from this dissertation due to lack of space, but I hope the richness developed in this study, thanks to archival research, demonstrates the burgeoning field.

The archives contain an astonishing amount of unstudied material, including the Linda Griffiths *fonds*, which holds so much material that even a dissertation could not house a robust analysis of it all. My purpose here has been to provide an in-depth study of Griffiths's work in order to reposition her in the field. I believe this dissertation should serve as a part of the foundation of a reinvigorated study of Linda Griffiths's work as well as that of theatre practitioners in Canada who have not received adequate attention. She speaks about time spent working on collective creations with Andrew Moodie: "And I don't know, it was an amazing feeling. . . . But I was also good at material, and suggesting material, and giving ideas. Which I didn't know that I was. So it was a huge opening of all of us. A seminal moment" (Griffiths, *On Creation*).

The passion with which theatre practitioners approach their craft is inspirational. Canadian theatre history contains many seminal moments that deserve scholarly attention. How can their personal papers and the archival analysis of them relay, amplify, and honour this passion and their dedication? I hope the primary methodology of this dissertation, listening to Linda, offers an answer.

Finally, evidence of Griffiths's legacy in Canadian theatre also exists in the remounts that her plays continue to receive. To have a play remounted is uncommon in this country. Griffiths is one of the only Canadian playwrights to have such a successful afterlife for her body of work. While this dissertation has not dealt with analyzing the remounts and numerous international productions of Griffiths's plays, these remain an important avenue of research. Why do they continue to succeed? As Griffiths writes,

“When actors do my work, that basic connection between the material and the audience isn’t there” (Griffiths, “Thief” 305). Indeed, and how does changing this affect the work? How do her plays continue to speak to the immediate moment, the time and place, of each new production?

Certain remounts provide cursory insights into these questions; those that adjust certain aspects of her performance design demonstrate the integral nature of Griffiths’s innate understanding of theatre and audience in her work. First, her success at the Shaw Festival demonstrates the magnificence of *Age of Arousal*. Shaw’s Artistic Director and the director of this production, Jackie Maxwell, says in the “Director’s Notes” from the programme: “George Gissing’s novel *The Odd Women* has provided the story, characters and circumstances for this play; but Linda has taken this material and infused it with her own energy, wit and riotous love of theatre magic, where time becomes fluid and language becomes an almost physical delight” (Programme). “Linda was a theatrical pioneer and adventurer. . . . She passionately believed that theatre is not just telling stories, but finding the perfect and very likely as yet undiscovered way of telling each one” (Nestruck). Indeed, *thoughtspeak* remains as Griffiths’s invented theatrical device that she resolutely championed and taught the actors to embody during each new production (Coleman, *Interview with Layne Coleman, July 2021*).

Factory Theatre’s 2015 remount of *Age of Arousal* was stripped down as part of the season’s goal: “Factory’s Naked Season is all about making meaning through asking questions about what happens when we strip something we think we know down to its

most essential parts” (Programme). Yet, despite the play’s initial success that led to it being staged at the Shaw Festival, this production felt unfinished. It seems that stripping the set and costume of *Age of Arousal* down actually removes an essential part of the play. Griffiths purposefully creates the entire performance event rather than focusing on the script alone. *Age of Arousal* is a complicated piece that reveals the thoughts of the characters. Part of that device and the play’s success in performance lies with the set and costuming. A production of *The Darling Family* similarly “used a set full of exaggerated women’s organs, the two characters standing and delivering on an enlarged vulva” on which Griffiths baldly comments, “It’s better on a bare stage” (Griffiths, “Process?” 60). These productions demonstrate that remounts in Canada can be successful, but to alter the form or Griffiths’s vision too much changes the performance events Griffiths herself so carefully curates.

In 2018, *Maggie & Pierre* was remounted at the Grand Theatre in London, Ontario. The programme pays great respect to Griffiths, even dedicating the production to her “and to both the rigor and hope that she inspires” (Kempson “Director’s Notes”). Moreover, it provides the spectator with important historical information in two sections, “Trudeau’s White Paper Policy” and “Trudeaumania: Politicians, Press, and the Public Eye” (Programme). The stage, positioned in the centre of the audience of the performance I attended, was beautifully designed. Actor Kaitlyn Riordan successfully played all three characters and held the audience’s attention masterfully, never once stepping off the stage. The costume changes and action of the play led to a messy and

scattered stage by the end, beautifully representative of the personal turmoil of the characters and of the performer's labour. Yet, Griffiths was always adamant that when Pierre got to his knees the audience was not to laugh. She could successfully keep each spectator in that state so the character can become emotionally vulnerable, an element that is so key to Pierre's characterization. The night I attended this production in London, while a spectacular evening, did lead to laughter at this point, which felt inappropriate, knowing the play as well as I do. The laughter helped me understand that without being guided very specifically by the performer into this space, the easier way to process Pierre's intense vulnerability—a state still found demeaning for men due to gender essentialism—is to laugh. Indeed, it continues to be uncomfortable to be brought to this galvanizing moment of real-life pain.

Alien Creature also received the distinct honour of being staged as a celebration of the 50th anniversary of Theatre Passe Muraille. In light of the theatre's numerous successes over many years, that *Alien Creature* was chosen speaks to its impact on the community, its popular success, and therefore its continued ability to draw a crowd; Linda continues to fill the Backspace. These performances speak to Sherrill Grace's astute considerations in her work about auto/biographical plays: "While I can imagine someone else performing these parts, I think the result would be quite different—not necessarily deficient, just different—because in each play, indeed, in each performance of each play, it is the author (character) who performs her/his identity for her/himself in relation to the audience" ("Towards a Theory" 72). Indeed, as I discuss in Chapter 3,

Griffiths creates *Alien Creature* through improvisation and leaves traces of herself in the play. At the same time, she creates such stunningly perspicacious plays that infinite avenues exist for each spectator and each new theatre practitioner to connect with her work.

Jani Lauzon has spoken of her hesitation when Andy McKim asked her to direct an *Alien Creature* remount. Lauzon said she could not find her way into the text by thinking about it through Griffiths, needing instead to enter the piece through her own body and experiences (Lauzon). Lauzon furthermore disclosed her need to hide her Indigeneity when she goes to the bank for loans to support her work (Lauzon). Settler artists such as MacEwen or Griffiths would receive different treatment. Coincidentally, Lauzon's experience as an artist eerily echoes MacEwen's trip to the bank in *Alien Creature*. Such moments of confluence build a clear picture of why Griffiths's work is so important and how her oeuvre remains relatable and continues to connect with contemporary audiences.¹⁶⁷ Indeed, Carly Maga's review title—"Alien Creature Is Still Relevant Today"—echoes this sentiment: "*Alien Creature* is a beautiful way to connect with legendary Canadian women artists, 'those magic women, alien creatures', both here and gone" (Maga).

Griffiths understands the transcendent power of the ephemeral moment of live performance. She seeks out connection with her audience and keeps extensive records of her work, publishing the final product of each script. Griffiths strives in her research to

¹⁶⁷ Artists in Canada undoubtedly still need and deserve more funding and financial support.

connect with this quality in the same way that I have, both seeking out records and historical material as well as speaking to people. She describes the process, “You talk to people, you read, you ingest. Talking to people is hard. . . . Sometimes they have nothing to say you can use, but maybe you’ve gotten a whiff of them, a bit of cellular detritus—something of that person is clinging to people they knew” (Griffiths, “Thief” 301).

I first met Griffiths during a talk she gave at Glendon College, York University. As a young, star-struck student, I purchased the first two plays of Griffiths’s that I could find available: *Alien Creature* and *Age of Arousal*. In the former, Griffiths wrote a most beguiling note above her signature, “To Amanda. May the muses smile”. This note has served as motivation throughout my writing process here. She did not know me then nor was studying her career in my dreams at that time, and yet she wished me well in this beautifully mystical and prescient way.

I have been able to tangibly experience the cellular detritus that Linda Griffiths, dedicated artist that she is, leaves behind through her archives and especially in conversation with Layne Coleman. Serendipitously, on March 3, 2020 during my last day in the archives before they closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic I stumbled across a document with the header “important cuts Dec.11,” an earlier version of a section from *Heaven Above, Heaven Below* in which SHE speaks about the birth control method she was using at the time of the unplanned pregnancy. She describes, years later, “digging through the horrible pile in the back room” and finding “the box of cervical caps . . . I must have just thrown them there, when it happened and then and more and more stuff

got piled on and—” (Griffiths, *Cuts* 1). HE inquires into her reasoning for keeping them. In the later version SHE merely replies “I didn’t know I had them” (Griffiths, *Heaven* 19). In this earlier text SHE replies: “I didn’t know I kept them. You think I wanted to frame sixteen puke pink sink stoppers? Put them in the archives?” (Griffiths, *Cuts* 1). This humorous moment also foresees her papers and materials making their way into an archive. Griffiths knew that her oeuvre deserved this in-depth attention and saved 71 boxes of archival material. I can only hope I do justice to her career and that this study invigorates a continued attention to her work, as well as to others in Canadian theatre whose memories, contributions, gifts, and dedication risk being forgotten.

Griffiths demonstrates on multiple levels the impact an artist can have on the theatre community and on her spectators. Her presence and her fierce dedication to her work is captured in a photo titled “The Worker.” Taken while she was in British Columbia to receive cancer treatment, this photo features Griffiths sitting at a desk with her laptop open, on the phone, glasses sliding down her nose, and with a wry smile. Traces of her cancer linger, a dark scarf tied on her head, a container separating her day into blue morning and pink evening remedies. Papers and electrical cords are strewn around her, a notebook or perhaps her agenda open beside her.

Worker, indeed. Linda Griffiths sits at this table rather than accepting the comfort of the couch behind her. She “believed in theatre as a way of life” and she “believed in the theatre gods” (Nestruck; Coleman, *Interview with Layne Coleman, July 2021*). Her lifelong dedication to performing in and creating for the theatre is intense and visceral. A

thick pad of paper, her open laptop, and her sitting posture symbolize for me the plays that could have been written if she were given more health, more time on her feet, more opportunity to fill those pages. Linda Griffiths's time was cut short, but she leaves in her work this incredible presence—an "expansive generous energy" that she shares so willingly with her audience and with her community.

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