

INVESTIGATING BRITISH COLUMBIA'S PAST: *The Komagata Maru Incident* and *The Hope Slide* as Historiographic Metadrama

GEORGE BELLIVEAU

IN *HISTORICAL DRAMA* Herbert Lindenberger admits “that by a strict definition one cannot categorize historical dramas as a genre at all, though one can speak of specific forms of historical plays which prevailed at certain moments in history” (1975, ix). In an important essay on Canadian historical drama, Richard Knowles notes that since the early 1970s, Canadian playwrights have been making use of a specific form of historical play – historiographic metadrama. He adapts this term from Linda Hutcheon’s idea of historiographic metafiction, which she discusses in *The Canadian Postmodern*, and suggests that this genre of drama incorporates “self-reflexive, metadramatic forms to highlight the instability both of history and dramatic texts” (Knowles 1987, 228). Knowles mentions that Canadian playwrights and collectives have been making use of historiographic metadrama for years – Rick Salutin and Theatre Passe Muraille’s *1837: The Farmers’ Revolt* (1973), Sharon Pollock’s *Walsh* (1973), James Reaney’s *Sticks and Stones* (1973), among others – yet, despite the “ripe and rewarding object of critical inquiry” (241) these plays offer, “Canadian drama and theatre critics ... have been slow to respond to deconstructionist Canadian plays on historical subjects” (229). This essay, which examines Sharon Pollock’s *The Komagata Maru Incident* (1976) and Joan MacLeod’s *The Hope Slide* (1992), takes up Knowles’s invitation to study Canadian plays on historical subjects as historiographic metadramas. *The Komagata Maru Incident* and *The Hope Slide* reexamine specific moments in British Columbia’s history by using metadramatic devices, and my investigation focuses on uncovering how, and, more importantly, why Pollock and MacLeod examine British Columbia’s past using this particular dramatic form.



Allan Stratton as T.S., Richard Fowler as Hopkinson, and Nicola Cavendish as Sophie in the Vancouver Playhouse production of Sharon Pollock's *The Komagata Maru Incident*, directed by Larry Lillo, January 1976. Published with the permission of the photographer, David Cooper. City of Vancouver Archives.

Both these plays resonate with the alternate theatre movement that took place in Canada during the late 1960s and 1970s. Eugene Benson and L.W. Connolly point to the Canadian alternate theatre movement as a phenomenon that prompted “a groundswell of interest in Canadian history, culture, and institutions” for playwrights and collectives (1987, 85). Pollock’s work was an instrumental component of the alternate theatre movement in Canada, with the premieres of *Walsh* in 1973 and *The Komagata Maru Incident* in 1976. Like those of many of her contemporaries, Pollock’s history plays were part of a “national celebration” (Rubin 1982, 21), albeit not necessarily one in which playwrights were championing past heroes; rather, Canadian playwrights were attempting to demystify the past, often painting so-called Canadian heroes in non-flattering ways. Given that these playwrights revisited Canadian historical events that displayed discriminatory, racist, and non-humanitarian behaviour, anti-heroes such as Walsh and *The Komagata Maru Incident*’s Hopkinson were not unusual. Plays that presented Canadians in anti-heroic roles included Theatre Passe Muraille’s *The Doukhobors* (1971) and *1837: The Farmers’ Revolt* (1974); James Reaney’s *Donnelly* trilogy (1973-5); and Carol Bolt’s *Buffalo Jump* (1972). During a 1979 interview with John Hofsess, Pollock asserted that “Canadians have this view of themselves as nice civilized people who have never participated in historical crimes and atrocities ... But that view is false (Hofsess 1979, 103).”

Almost twenty years after the height of the alternative theatre movement in Canada, MacLeod writes her own version of the Doukhobors, and, like Pollock and other contemporary playwrights, she experiments with non-linear, historiographic approaches in order to share her perspective in *The Hope Slide*. MacLeod creates a one-person play with an actor as her central character. The late 1980s and early 1990s saw many other talented writer/performers writing plays for one or maybe two actors (Daniel MacIvor, Guillermo Verdecchia, Linda Griffiths, and Wendy Lill, among others), and these works often play with time and space as well as make use of metadramatic devices. Again, the actor as a central character is not unusual in Canadian drama; in fact, Pollock’s best known play, *Blood Relations*, contains an actress as a central figure. The character of the actor within a play increases self-reflexivity, and in the case of Irene in *The Hope Slide* the deliberate choice of an actor playing an actor accentuates the playwright’s message about the devastating losses that occurred in the theatre community due to the widespread havoc wrought by AIDS. MacLeod’s *The Hope Slide* uses a historiographic metadramatic approach to revisit a

particular period in British Columbia's history (that involving the Doukhobors during the 1960s) and to suggest a parallel between the persecution of the Doukhobors and the fate of the theatre community's AIDS victims during the 1980s and 1990s.

It is difficult to pinpoint precisely what elements a play must incorporate in order to be historiographic. However, if we define some of the differences between a historiographic drama and historical fiction, then we are better able to discuss the work of Pollock and MacLeod. On the one hand, historical fiction more often than not involves the imaginative creation of plausible but fictional private conversations or situations wherein the facts of the case are not known; on the other hand, historiographic drama generally contains self-conscious dramatic devices that make the audience aware that the play they are watching is a representation of the past. This essay focuses on the latter. Both Pollock and MacLeod consciously make the audience aware that the play they are watching is clearly a representation of the past, one possible version of what happened. It is worth noting that most historical dramas raise questions about how the past is reconstructed; however, what makes a historiographic drama distinct is that it also raises awareness about the assumptions and conventions according to which we reconstruct that past.

Metadrama has been used in theatre since at least the sixteenth century, when it was often incorporated into the chronicle history plays of the Elizabethan era. Ever since Shakespeare and his colleagues utilized this dramatic method, "the re-creation of history on the stage has frequently represented the past metadramatically" (Knowles 1987, 229). When metadrama is combined with contemporary historiographic thinking, the result – historiographic metadrama – often produces a self-reflexive drama that emphasizes the theatricality of any representation of life. *The Komagata Maru Incident* and *The Hope Slide* both contain elements of historiographic metadrama; namely, a play within the play that is history-based. And these inner plays deliberately highlight the subjectivity of recorded history, encouraging the audience to question historical records. In addition, the use of metadramatic devices within the plays suggest to the audience that there are many possible ways to represent historical events other than the one being presented. Pollock's and MacLeod's "blurring of fact and fiction, part of our postmodern climate, can be interpreted as a deliberate device to undermine the authority of the established historical version" (Zimmerman 1994, 68).

Pollock's *The Komagata Maru Incident* premiered in 1976 at the Vancouver East Cultural Centre. It is the story of the 376 would-be immigrants of East Indian origin aboard the steamer *Komagata Maru* who were denied entry into Canada despite their legal rights. Set in 1914 Vancouver, the play makes use of a carnival-like circus atmosphere. Pollock's T.S., the master of ceremonies, reconstructs history by theatrically staging the Canadian government's success in denying the mostly Sikh East Indians their rightful entry into the country. T.S. opens the play by addressing the audience directly from the outer ring, or runway arc, of the playing space: "This is Vancouver, ladies and gentlemen, the 21st day of May, nineteen hundred and fourteen" (Pollock 1978, 1). He then gradually leads the audience to the action inside the circus ring, where he creates the sensation that the paying audience is viewing a circus show. From the beginning, T.S. openly shows his puppet-master control over the events and characters, thus making the audience aware of Pollock's deliberate attempt to present history as a theatrical retelling. With a snap of his fingers, T.S. gets a spotlight on himself, then with a bang of his cane he makes Hopkinson (an inspector in the immigration office) and Evy (a brothel proprietor) come to life. With another bang of his cane, they freeze, and the spot returns to him (2). T.S. performs the same magical feat with Georg (a German patron of the brothel) and Sophie (a prostitute working for Evy) in the opening scene. Finally, by pulling a cover he reveals the Sikh Woman on board the *Komagata Maru*, the sole physical representative of the East Indians.

In setting up the play within the play, Pollock implicates the paying audience in the incident; they become bystanders and participants in the racist side-show. Knowles suggests that the central subject of the play "is its predominantly white audience, for whose benefit both Hopkinson and the theatre company act" (1987, 238). He later comments that "we are confronted with our ability to detach ourselves from action that 'doesn't concern us,' but for which we are necessarily passive accomplices" (239). For his part, Robert Nunn notes that "as an audience, watching *The Komagata Maru Incident* we are alienated from an automatic acceptance of the predominance of the 'White Race' in our country: it didn't just happen; choices were made and continue to be made to maintain it. The play forces us to either criticize or justify the state of affairs: we cannot take it for granted" (Nunn 1984, 56). Both critics suggest that Pollock questions (and indirectly accuses) her audience regarding its inaction on the subject of racism.

One of Pollock's first stage directions is: "*T.S. observes the audience entering [while the] other characters are frozen on stage*" (Production Note). In this sense, the traditional roles are reversed as the audience becomes the focus of interest for those on stage. The actors wait for their onlookers and T.S. makes the audience aware of the play's meta-theatricality with his solicitations: "Hurry! Hurry! Hurry! Right this way!" (1). His invitation serves to enhance the spectators' participation in the incident. Through this metatheatrical technique, Pollock implies that her audience, by remaining indifferent to it in their daily lives, inadvertently perpetuate racism. An example of the audience's complacency towards racism occurs early in the play when Evy vividly recounts to Hopkinson a fight she saw from the tram window. She describes how a Sikh was violently beaten by (presumably White) men while waiting in an employment line:

They knocked him down, the man in the turban, they were kicking, and then pushing and shoving to get in a blow – and the tram pulled away ... it was gone. As if I'd imagined it. It had never been ... I should have done something ... And I just sat on the goddamn tram and came home. (16)

Evy then looks "out the window" to the theatre audience and says: "There are ... people at the end of Burrard, staring out at that ship ... They look like the men in that line" (16). This scene directly implicates the audience and invites them to reflect on their own inaction with regard to instances of overt racism. Pollock triggers the audience's memory and actively asks it to consider racism today. According to Reid Gilbert, Pollock exaggerates the violence and hatred in an effort to shock the members of a modern audience and make them acknowledge their role in this historical prejudice (116). In her Programme Note for the first production of *The Komagata Maru Incident*, Pollock supports this claim: "The attitudes expressed by the general populace of that time [1914], and paraphrased throughout the play, are still around today and, until we face this fact, we can never change it" (Gilbert 1986, 107-8).

At the end of the play, it becomes evident that Pollock's T.S. manipulated and controlled every aspect of the inner play. After the government officials are successful in denying access to the East Indians and the *Komagata Maru* is forced out of the harbour, T.S. leads the audience to the courtroom. During this final scene T.S. steps into the action and plays the roles of judge, prosecuting attorney,

and narrator – all positions of power. He describes how Inspector Hopkinson attempts to redeem his inner guilt but points out that it is too late. In approaching the courtroom, Hopkinson is gunned down by Mewa Singh, a Sikh nationalist. We come to realize that Hopkinson is the middle person in the negotiations and that he had done what his superiors told him needed to be done. Within the inner play, Hopkinson is manipulated like a puppet by the government officials (played by T.S.), and this is emphasized through the way in which T.S. manipulates everything near him. T.S. is not only the master of ceremonies, he is also the puppet master of the entire play. This omniscient power allows T.S. to manipulate the dramatic characters as well as to focus the action in whatever direction he wishes. This is exemplified in Pollock's final stage directions: "[T.S.] *touches HOPKINSON with the cane. HOPKINSON's head falls forward. T.S. does a soft shoe shuffle to centre stage, he stops, looks out, raises his arms, pauses for a beat, and makes a large but simple bow – Blackout*" (47).

The inner play in *The Komagata Maru Incident* reminds the audience how, to a certain extent, history is shaped by whoever is retelling it and that Pollock, via her dramatic characters, is interpreting the circumstances that led Hopkinson (and the Canadian government) to deny entry to the passengers on board the *Komagata Maru*. In their essay "Documenting Racism: Sharon Pollock's *The Komagata Maru Incident*," Sherrill Grace and Gabriele Helms note the difference between how the *Komagata Maru* incident is interpreted in Sarjeet Singh Jagpal's *Becoming Canadians: Pioneer Sikhs in Their Own Words* (1994) and in Robert Jarvis's *The 'Komagata Maru' Incident: A Canadian Immigration Battle Revisited* (1992): "Jarvis sees William Hopkinson as 'a Canadian martyr and hero' (Jarvis 1) and Mewa Singh as 'the Sikh terrorist and murderer of William Hopkinson' (43), while for Jagpal and the Sikh community, Hopkinson is the 'corrupt immigration official' and Mewa Singh 'a Sikh martyr' (Jagpal 34)" (Grace and Helm 1998, 91). Both Jarvis and Jagpal presumably worked from the same available source material, yet their interpretation, and no doubt personal politics, steered their rewriting of history in particular directions.

Pollock too has her politics and interpretation of the events embedded in her play, and, by using T.S. as a master of ceremonies who presents and theatricalizes the events of 1914, the playwright openly admits her perspective on what transpired during the *Komagata Maru* incident. The metatheatrical atmosphere never assumes that it

is replaying *the* story and *the* reasons why this incident occurred. Pollock's Playwright's Note contains the following disclaimer, which frees her to stray from documented accounts of the incident: "*The Komagata Maru Incident* is a theatrical impression of an historical event seen through the optique of the stage and the mind of the playwright. It is not a documentary account, although much of it is documented. To encompass these facts, time and place are often compressed, and certain dramatic license is employed." Pollock's political intent in *The Komagata Maru Incident* is quite overt. For example, the audience, in listening to T.S., cannot ignore the bitter sarcasm. In one instance, the master of ceremonies describes the situation at hand this way: "A Japanese steamer chock-full of brown-skin Hindus headed for a predominantly pale Vancouver, and entry into whitish Canada. The *Komagata Maru* in blue Canadian waters!" (3). One does not have to look very far, then, to see the perspective that steers the play. The word "optique" is fitting because it calls to mind the subjectivity involved when elements are viewed through a particular lens. Clearly, in a historiographic drama, historical events are subjectively presented to suit the goals of the playwright.

Joan MacLeod's *The Hope Slide* premiered at Toronto's Tarragon Theatre in 1992. The play investigates, among other things, the history of the Doukhobors in British Columbia during the 1960s. The one-person play centres on Irene, a middle-aged actress who is touring a play about the Doukhobors in south central British Columbia. The play contains three realities: the present (with Irene on tour), a remembered past (when Irene was a teenager), and the poetic testaments of three Doukhobors (the play that Irene is actually touring). The testaments create the central metadramatic aspect of the play, and these "richly imagistic monologues ... bring to life the distinct voices of three Doukhobor martyrs" (Leyshon 1994, 13): Mary Kalmakoff, who dies when part of a mountain near Hope buries her and her car; Harry Kootnikoff, who dies when a bomb he is building explodes in his lap in the back seat of a car; and Paul Podmorrow, whose hunger strike in an Agassiz, British Columbia, prison leads to his death. When Irene depicts the final moments in the lives of these three martyrs, she does not hide the fact that she is appropriating Doukhobor voices; rather, she deliberately presents the monologues as theatricalized re-enactments. MacLeod's stage directions indicate that "IRENE lights a candle and speaks in the voice of Mary Kalmakoff" (MacLeod 1994, 25). Then, for the second monologue, "IRENE pulls

up her scarf, bandit style, lights a match and speaks in the voice of a Doukhobor boy, Harry Kootnikoff" (29). During the third monologue, "IRENE ties her kerchief around her neck, and speaks in the voice of Paul Podmorrow" (35). The actress, Irene, does not attempt to hide the fact that she is playing the part of the Doukhobors, and the language MacLeod uses for the three monologues is distinct from that used in the rest of the play. The voices in this inner play appear to arise from the dead, creating a surreal and poetic atmosphere. For instance, Irene's restaging of Harry's death includes the following:

I am a man, riding in the back of the car with the bomb being built in my lap. I have a careful hand, careful touch and maybe it's a bump in the road but all of a sudden all is white and loud and I am pushing through, pushing through something strong but thin. It is my own head and here I am flying above the scattered car, my friends blood-splattered and still. I understand I am gone now, dead. (31)

Through Irene's role playing, Mary, Harry, and Paul are able to recall the events that led to their tragic deaths and to express the sensation of dying. In the metadramatic replaying of the past, *The Hope Slide* blends recorded history with conjecture. At the outset, Irene explains that the "characters I play were real people, ghosts I have stolen and made speak. Doukhobors" (17). Irene brings to life the three Doukhobor martyrs in the play within the play because she does not want them to be forgotten. Like Irene's close friend, Walter, the Doukhobors suffered untimely deaths, but the actress feels compelled to remember and celebrate their courage, dreams, and desire to make change. At Walter's bedside, moments before he dies of AIDS, Irene appears to lose hope. However, the text suggests that, through her journey of self-discovery, in replaying the lives of the three Doukhobors, Irene finds the inner strength to protest: "I protest the deaths of these young men. My heart is full of courage, brave to make change, upheaval. I protest the deaths of these young men. My friends, my heart, my beautiful brothers" (44). Like the three martyrs in her touring play, Walter and the rest of the theatre community who are dying from AIDS need to be celebrated and not forgotten. Compared to other Canadian AIDS plays of the late 1980s, such as Kent Stetson's *Warm Wind in China* (1988), MacLeod's protests are more subtle when it comes to recognizing the great losses suffered in the theatre community.

MacLeod's historical research for the play stems primarily from Simma Holt's 1964 book about the Doukhobors, *Terror in the Name of God*. Holt, a Vancouver journalist, sensationalizes the Doukhobors in her historical fiction and takes dramatic licence in recording most events; that is, she fills her narrative with what *may* have happened. Her writing evinces a theatrical and sensational tone, which MacLeod seems to borrow for her play. The manner in which both writers describe Podmorrow's hunger strike provides a good example of the mixture between what happened (recorded facts) and what may have happened (fiction). Holt describes Podmorrow's condition when the doctors decided to force-feed him after his thirty-two-day hunger strike:

Inside the prison, at noon that Thursday, August 22, the doctor came to Paul Podmorrow's bed. The summer brightness spread in a sunburst over the emaciated face. But not even this gave colour to the haggard, yellow-grey countenance of the youth. The blanket over his body seemed to be only a few inches up from the mattress. He was skeletal thin. "How do you feel today, Paul?" asked the doctor. "I am all right," he replied weakly ... When the doctor had left, Paul Podmorrow got up from his bunk, walked slowly, haltingly to the washroom and cleaned up slightly. He did not have the strength to keep his arms up long enough to scrub his face and neck. He walked back, lay down on his bunk, never to walk again. Guards and medical staff slipped a tube inside his nose and force-fed him – his first food for thirty-two days. He lay passive, listless and uncomplaining. (282)

Holt's use of the omniscient narrative voice gives the impression that she was actually there, witnessing the events at Podmorrow's death bed. On the other hand, MacLeod's re-interpretation/dramatization of Podmorrow through Irene's inner play clearly illustrates a self-conscious presentation of history as reconstruction. In the role of actor, Irene takes the audience inside Podmorrow's mind, where the prisoner expresses his feelings and thoughts during the final moments of his life:

My prison is small. Bars at the door, bars at the bed. Don't come near me doctor, teacher, devil. Don't talk to me, teach me words. I am a child of God, a child of my mother, my mother. Where is my mother? Paul! She is calling me in for supper, she is wrapping her big arms around me. But I am here, now, and this is prison and I am a man. "We openly declare to all that we are on a hunger strike until

death. The government refuses to investigate our matters and we protest." And now the devil is trying to stick a tube for feeding inside of me. I want to fight him but my arms are made of feathers and the fight is going out of me. (36)

Both MacLeod and Holt's interpretations respect the recorded facts pertaining to Podmorrow. For instance, the two writers acknowledge that Paul Podmorrow participated in the hunger strike for thirty-two days and that he was later admitted to a hospital, where he was force-fed and, not long afterwards, died. However, unlike Holt's presumably documented and so-called "historical" account of the events, MacLeod's text does not propose to tell what actually took place; rather, in creating a metadramatic inner play, MacLeod deliberately makes her audience aware that her story of Paul Podmorrow's is a reconstruction, a restaging of what may have happened. In playing out the reconstructed history in a play within a play, MacLeod provides a strong example of Knowles's concept of historiographic metadrama. *The Hope Slide* meshes fact and fiction and openly acknowledges that it is restaging and reconstructing history.

Irene's past (i.e., her teenage years), the second reality in the play, is also highly theatrical, particularly with regard to the history project on the Doukhobors that she presents to her Grade 9 classmates. MacLeod carefully sets up the scene, with Irene in costume: "She is wearing a scarf knotted on the side of her neck, a large locket, a cardigan that is on backwards. Her skirt is inside out. Her socks are worn over her shoes" (19). Slides, props, and music are used in order to provide a fuller presentational effect. The history project becomes another play within the play. Irene's enthusiasm and determination to depict the pain Paul Podmorrow suffered during his hunger strike is highly theatrical and eventually goes overboard. In the spirit of the Doukhobors, she takes off her shirt and tries to rally her class to rebellion: "On behalf of him I call you to arms! I call you to fight goddamn you, fight goddamn you, fight goddamn you! Fight!" (24). Her over-zealous behaviour and desire to express herself in an unorthodox manner led to her expulsion from the school, to her having to repeat Grade 9, and to having to meet with a truant officer on a weekly basis. Metaphorically, the young Irene embodies the persecution experienced by the Doukhobor community. The teenage Irene's desire to find a community to which to belong is echoed in the information she shares during her history project. She envies the sense of community and belonging that she reads into the lives of the Doukhobors.

However, when she ventures out to the Kootenays to see that community, she feels that she has been deceived: "They are not proper Doukhobors. They are eating canned ham and watching 'Car 54' on television. The world is full of phonies" (39).

Irene's passion to fight for a cause during her youth resurfaces when she is an adult, and MacLeod strategically has the adult Irene engage in a monologue in which, in memory of her friend Walter, she revisits Podmorrow's determination to fight until the end. Like Podmorrow, Walter was a visionary: he could see "something coming that no one else could" (35). "What is it? What do you see?" Irene asks three times (35, 42, 45). Walter had plans to build a great city where "all the buildings will be round, the cars will run on air and nobody will have to work anymore" (34). In this "great and wonderful city [a] dome will protect us from the elements, from war, from all possible danger" (42). This utopian plan bears a resemblance to the original Doukhobors' communal way of life, which, unfortunately, was rendered impossible in British Columbia due to government and police interference. The parallels between Podmorrow and Walter go beyond the descriptions of them lying on their deathbeds: they are both Irene's heroes, and, through their strength and vision, she finds the courage to protest human tragedies. She refuses to allow the memories of the Doukhobors and AIDS victims to be buried:

Tomorrow I will fly over the Hope Slide. It is getting more and more difficult to see the slide from the air, green covers the mountains, brave young trees planting themselves in impossible places, the lost highway now covered by shrubs and moss and all manner of living things. But I still remember the way it looked in the beginning . . . when the slide first happened, and that is something that can't be covered over. The memory is locked in and has affected now forever the way I see. You can't really bury your friends, not ever. (44)

Irene's image of the "huge pile of rocks and mashed up trees" along the Hope-Princeton Highway cannot be erased (41). This natural devastation took several human lives, including Mary Kalmakoff's. After years of new growth, it now seems that the effects of the Hope Slide are barely noticeable (i.e., they are nearly forgotten), and this is reminiscent of what has happened to the Doukhobors of the 1960s and the AIDS victims of the 1980s and 1990s, who are slowly being forgotten. Irene refuses to allow this, so her play is an act of protest, an insistence upon remembering and celebrating those who died young.

The three monologues concerning the Doukhobors (the inner play) and Irene's history project are highly theatrical and provide a particular, subjective perspective on the treatment and history of the Doukhobors in British Columbia. Looking at *The Hope Slide* through a wider lens, one realizes that MacLeod's overriding theme concerns the loss of hope and a dying people. She implicitly makes use of the persecuted Doukhobors as a metaphor for the hundreds of men from the theatre community who were dying from AIDS. The word "AIDS" is never uttered in the play, yet it is apparent that Irene's cry against the persecution of the Doukhobors parallels her protest against the death of her close friend Walter, who is dying from the "modern plague." *The Hope Slide* gives voice to the Doukhobors through meta-drama, yet it does not propose to answer or determine precisely why these people were unable to exercise their freedom; instead, the moral outrage of MacLeod's inner play about the Doukhobors of the 1960s becomes a vehicle for protesting the AIDS epidemic of the late 1980s and 1990s.

MacLeod and Pollock re-open discussions and debates about what actually happened in the past. In using historiographic metadrama, both playwrights openly acknowledge the impossibility of presenting an authentic truth and a definitive history. *The Komagata Maru Incident* and *The Hope Slide* highlight how history, in this case British Columbia's history, is recreated each time it is retold or restaged. Despite being written sixteen years apart and dealing with different populations (Sikhs and Doukhobors), both plays have at their centre a moral injustice that the playwrights want to revisit. Both playwrights opt to use metadrama to restage historical moments, thus making the audience aware that what they are seeing is a perspective on what took place. In Pollock's case, the members of the paying audience involuntarily become bystanders, and the self-reflexive dramatic devices encourage them to rethink the events surrounding the *Komagata Maru* incident, seeing them as explicit acts of racism – a racism that continues to exist in Vancouver. With *The Hope Slide*, MacLeod wants us to remember the challenges faced by the Doukhobors during the 1960s; however, just as important, her inner play prompts us to remember the widespread devastation wrought by AIDS throughout the theatre community in the 1980s and 1990s.

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