

# THE EXPRESSIONIST LEGACY IN THE CANADIAN THEATRE

*George Ryga and Robert Gurik*

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Anyone in this day and age . . . who does not “openly and honestly declare war on naturalism in art,” must capitulate in the face of every newsreel.<sup>1</sup>

**T**ODAY TO “declare war on naturalism in art” does not necessarily mean that an artist must work expressionistically. It is nevertheless true that expressionism has had a lasting and profound effect on all the arts in this century, none more so than the drama. The heyday of German expressionist drama was the period just after the First World War, but the legacy of playwrights like Georg Kaiser and Ernst Toller, of designers like Leopold Jessner and Jürgen Fehling, and of directors such as the great Max Reinhardt (especially in his Berlin *Kammerspiele*) remains with us in staging and production techniques, in the structure and dramaturgical qualities of scripts, and in the socio-political themes and treatment of character in contemporary plays.<sup>2</sup> In Canada, however, very little critical or scholarly attention has been paid to either play texts or productions until quite recently; critics are still wrestling with the misconception that in Canada art is (even should be) realist. This critical mind-set characterizes much thinking, not only about the theatre, but also about fiction and the visual arts — despite the expressionist canvasses of Emily Carr, Max Borenstein, Maxwell Bates, and much contemporary painting, or such patently non-realist fictions as *Tay John*, *The Double Hook*, *Beautiful Losers*, *Under the Volcano*, and *Neige noire*, not to mention most recent work by Jack Hodgins, Robert Kroetsch, and Michael Ondaatje.

Given this situation, my purpose here is twofold. First, I want to explore the parameters of expressionism in the Canadian theatre by examining its historical contexts and by looking closely at two excellent plays which, I maintain, are best understood as expressionistic. Second, I hope to demonstrate that expressionism has played an important role in our theatre arts and thereby to dislodge a little our critical bias towards realism. Certainly, many Canadian plays use expressionist

techniques to one degree or another: for example, the set and apocalyptic ending of Michael Cook's *Jacob's Wake*, Timothy Findley's portrayal of social collapse through the intense subjectivity of madness in *Can You See Me Yet?* and the violence, suffering, paratactic structure and monologues of Michael Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* or Michel Tremblay's *En pièces détachées* and *Albertine en cinq temps*. But the two texts I will concentrate on are George Ryga's famous *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* (1967) and Robert Gurik's less well-known *Le Procès de Jean-Baptiste M.* (1972).<sup>3</sup>

Before moving on to specific analysis, however, it is necessary to outline briefly the nature of expressionism itself and the Canadian theatre context for these two plays. I should note as well that the Ryga and Gurik texts were not chosen haphazardly. Written within five years of each other, they are both "tribunal" plays that address social issues of the day and they are, moreover, representative of the *oeuvre* of each author, insofar as neither Ryga nor Gurik is interested in the *bête noire* of realism. Gurik speaks for both men when he says that "Le théâtre n'est théâtre que dans la mesure où il brise le paravent de la réalité apparente d'un milieu, d'une époque, pour révéler la vérité."<sup>4</sup>

Expressionist aesthetics begin with the assumption that reality, or truth, is subjectively known through what Wassily Kandinsky spoke of as spiritual "inner need" (*innere Notwendigkeit*) or Georg Kaiser called *die Vision*.<sup>5</sup> For the expressionist, art derives from and represents the emotional intensity, spiritual longings and sufferings, or ecstatic visions of the individual — whether the artist *himself* or the represented protagonist of a novel or play. In order to present such visions, be they visions of transformation (*Wandlung* and *Erlösung*) or nightmarish soul-states (the *Schrei*), the artist was obliged to develop an expressionist vocabulary in contradistinction to the so-called "banality of surfaces" privileged by realism, naturalism, and impressionism. An expressionist vocabulary is one which relies on distortion, abstraction, intensity, and parataxis to present the subject's inner vision, and each of these elements operates semiotically, in the media of painting, sculpture, graphics, cinema, dance, literature (prose and poetry), and theatre (in both the writing of the play and its production).

The non-representationality of expressionism, however, should not be reduced simplistically to one style or intention. By its very nature, that is the "expressive fallacy," it will be varied.<sup>6</sup> But these variations can be usefully organized around the fundamental expressionist tension between two extremes: empathy and abstraction.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the more empathetic the work, the more it will lean towards the representation of recognizable forms and invite viewer/reader/spectator identification, while the more abstract the work the less representational it will be and the more difficult it will be for an audience to recognize or identify with its subject; empathetic expressionism appeals directly to our deepest emotions, but abstracted expressionism has a greater intellectual, often satiric, appeal. In brief, what this tension

between empathy and abstraction means for the stage is that a play may call for sets, lighting, and acting style that are distorted for intense emotional impact and that represent the inner projections of the recognizably human hero, or it may require minimally abstract sets, extreme reduction of the characters to types and highly stylized acting in order to focus on larger truths about the world we live in and man's subjective relation to that world. Beyond empathetic expressionist drama lie increasingly realistic treatments of tragic suffering and individual struggle; beyond abstracted expressionism lies the theatre of the absurd or the minimalist universe of Beckett. Although few expressionist plays can easily be categorized as one type or the other, most fall somewhere along my imaginary line between these two poles, and all utilize qualities that exploit the tension between empathy and abstraction.

As the heritage of expressionism unfolds from Germany in the twenties to the present, a more empathetic expressionism can be traced from a playwright like Ernst Toller to Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams, while abstracted expressionist theatre develops from the *Denkspiele* of Georg Kaiser to Elmer Rice in the United States. During the sixties, the new committed theatre of Peter Weiss and Rolf Hochhuth, of Joseph Chaikin's Open Theatre in the United States and a large number of American Vietnam plays combined ideas developed earlier by Piscator and christened "documentary drama" with a variety of expressionist techniques. Many of these sixties' plays use the courtroom as their primary setting, in part because the setting is inherently dramatic (and has been since the time of Aeschylus), and in part because the tribunal constituted a perfect metaphor (as Kafka also knew) for a century on trial. Such a setting also enabled the text and the production to include (even co-opt) the audience/reader as either defendant or jury member.<sup>8</sup>

Whatever their own individual influences and sources might have been, Ryga's *Ecstasy* and Gurik's *Procès* are highly expressionistic tribunal plays which, each in its own way, addresses urgent contemporary problems in a style that mixes documentary detail and socio-political critique with intense, highly imaginative and experimental dramaturgy. Ryga's roots are notoriously difficult to locate because his formal education was slim and he adopted a sharp anti-intellectual stance in adult life. Christopher Innes goes so far as to suggest that he essentially forged a new dramatic form *ex nihilo*, but Ryga himself mentions enjoying Albee and Dostoevsky, and early drafts of *Ecstasy* suggest an acquaintance with O'Neill's first expressionist *tour de force*, *The Emperor Jones* (a point I shall return to).<sup>9</sup> Gurik is less shy of acknowledging his roots which include Kafka (Joseph K. rather obviously prefiguring Jean-Baptiste M.), Brecht, and the French playwright Armand Gatti.<sup>10</sup> Whether or not Elmer Rice's expressionist classic *The Adding Machine* (first performed in New York in 1923) was a direct influence on either Ryga or Gurik (more particularly Gurik) I cannot say. But in tracing the com-

bination of tribunal drama with expressionist presentation of individual suffering and socio-political critique, Rice's play should not be forgotten. It received a total of ninety-two productions between 1958 and 1963, and Rice went on to write other expressionistic plays such as *The Subway* (1924) and *Judgement Day* (1934).<sup>11</sup>

**T**URNING FROM THE EXPRESSIONIST LEGACY to the Canadian theatre situation, one finds little serious *theoretical* drama criticism in this country until the last decade. The first important example is Brian Parker's 1977 article "Is There a Canadian Drama?" and, to date, I know of no study that has picked up his argument and continued the theoretical investigation.<sup>12</sup> In this study, Parker discusses three plays which he believes mark the beginnings of genuinely first-rate writing for the theatre in Canada: Tremblay's *A toi pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou* (1971), Reaney's *Colours in the Dark* (1967), and Ryga's *Ecstasy*. Briefly, Parker's argument is that these plays successfully combine what he calls an "international" or "spatial form" with "local subject matter" and that their "combination of intense particularity with a sense of arbitrary pattern is typically Canadian" (Parker 187). Although Parker notes the importance of Tennessee Williams to Tremblay and of Thornton Wilder to Reaney, and although he praises the "nonlinear, disjunctive" structures of these plays, together with their impressive use of monologues and intense emotional patterning, nowhere does he mention expressionism. And yet, it seems plausible that expressionism (both empathetic and abstracted) is what we have here. Furthermore, to describe these plays as expressionistic in this or that respect is, I would argue, more useful because more specific than to describe them loosely as having an "international" or a "spatial form." However, in talking about these playwrights in formal, rather than thematic, terms, Parker has taken the necessary first step towards the kind of analysis that Ryga and Gurik deserve.

Both *Ecstasy* and *Procès* take place in court: in *Ecstasy* the heroine, Rita Joe, has been charged with numerous counts of prostitution, theft, and so on; in *Procès* the hero, Jean-Baptiste M., has murdered three of his bosses after being fired from the Dutron company where he worked. While facing judge and jury, Rita Joe and Jean-Baptiste relive their past lives in memory flashbacks punctuated by raucous outbursts from those around them and chanted accusations from the officials. Both characters are victims of an unjust and inhuman system that grinds them down relentlessly — Rita Joe because she is native and female, Jean-Baptiste because he is "un monsieur-tout-le-monde" (*Procès* 9) and a French Canadian. Rita Joe is raped then murdered in the penultimate scene, together with her Indian boyfriend, Jaimie Paul, whose broken body is tossed by the white murderers onto the railway track before an advancing train. Jean-Baptiste is pronounced "cou-pable" of killing his three bosses, but his sentence is to be told that his act is

meaningless; “Au travail” shouts his second victim and the play closes with a crescendo of office noises and the mechanical chanting of the judges and witnesses as they enumerate the products made by Dutron :

Plus fort  
 Harder  
 Faster  
 Louder  
 Tous ensemble  
 . . .  
 le fréon  
 le delux  
 le lacete  
 le teflon [etc.] (*Procès* 90)

Insofar as there is a plot to speak of in either play, it is very simple indeed. Very little action, in the traditional sense of the word, takes place because most of what we see is either a projection of the central protagonists' troubled minds, memories, or feelings or a distorted, highly stylized and stereotyped presentation of society at large — church, school, and welfare system in *Ecstasy*, family and business in *Procès*. But as the endings of each play suggest, there are important differences in the handling of subject matter that need to be identified; where *Ecstasy* opens out into a quasi-tragic vision of its heroine, *Procès* moves steadily away from that possibility and towards a satiric, black comic *exposé* of its hero and his world.

Of the two acts that compose *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* the first is divided almost equally between the intense inner world of Rita, who stands before a Magistrate, and a distorted view of the court. Which one of a possible seven charges she is facing, what time, day, or year it is, and which Magistrate are all irrelevant because Rita's position is timeless and, in any case, the court cannot tell one Indian from another. “You . . . are Rita Joe?” the Magistrate asks. “I know your face . . . yet . . . it wasn't in this courtroom. Or was it?” (*Ecstasy* 23). Throughout the act, Ryga juxtaposes Rita's turbulent inner world with the grotesqueness of her actual surroundings. The implication is that this world is being seen both from her troubled perspective *and* as it really is. To create this powerful hallucinatory effect, Ryga has used his stage well. His notes call for a circular ramp that sweeps forward into the audience (thereby implicating us directly in the trial) with “Backstage, a mountain cycloarama” and “a darker maze curtain to suggest gloom and confusion, and a cityscape” in front of the cyclorama (*Ecstasy* 16). Both lighting and sound effects are calculated to distort what we see and hear and to heighten feelings of dread, threat, terror, confusion, or even, by contrast, of lyrical joy. Spots are used both to control playing space, especially when Rita is isolated from the others, and to suggest emotion; a cold, blue light, for example, is called for every time danger evokes fear. Important sound effects range from the omnipresent sound of the

train, which will become deafening in the final moments of Act Two, to cacophonous voice-overs and the “nightmare babble” of voices that accompanies her condemnation at the end of Act One. In an early draft of the play, Ryga called for a drum beat that would suggest Rita’s heart during the rape scene; it would start regularly, speed up, become erratic, then stop when the men had killed her, much the way O’Neill used drums in his 1920 expressionist play *The Emperor Jones*. Ryga’s use of the folk singer who is both Rita’s alter ego and an ironic image of white liberal middle-class interest is more problematic, but she is nonetheless an obvious non-naturalistic device.

By far the most interesting and important feature of Ryga’s expressionist dramaturgy here, however, is the fragmented and paratactic structure of the material. There are no scene divisions in either act so that the montage of disparate images flows together without any of the conventional, logical, linear, or temporal connections that are typical of the realistic play. This is what Parker was describing as the play’s “spatial form,” but it is a paratactic structure that is common in expressionist writing.<sup>13</sup> What ties these scenes together temporally is the metaphor of a life, what the Germans called the *Stationen* form, and what anchors them in space is the tribunal metaphor. Rita, then, is reliving her life in a sequence of flashbacks in the moments before her death. What the audience must judge in the process, however, is not the woman on trial but the society that condemns her to this pitiful life and violent death.

Although the majority of the characters in *Ecstasy* are types identified primarily by their functions — the Magistrate, the teacher, the priest, the murderers (who are also the witnesses), the Indian men, etc. — the three main Indian characters have more flesh and blood on their bones. Jaimie Paul, David Joe, the father, and Rita have more humanity than their white tormentors, and the audience is thereby forced to identify with their plight, their inner life, their vision of the truth. For some readers or audience members, this factor may be a problem. It could be argued that this identification is melodramatic, sentimental, or even an act of false consciousness in which the “expressive fallacy” betrays the very individuals it is intended to serve. However one views the strategy, it is this human element, this extra dimension of individuality and suffering, that creates the empathy experienced by the spectator that sharply distinguishes *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* from *Le Procès de Jean-Baptiste M.*

*Le Procès* opens quite spectacularly. The first thing an audience hears is a montage of office noises — typewriters, telephones, telex, bells, industrial machines, cafeteria dishes, and so on. This cacophony, so reminiscent of *Le ballet mécanique* or of Elmer Rice’s techniques in *The Adding Machine*, comes to an abrupt halt at the tapping sound of a conductor’s baton. The lights go out; there is a brief pause:

puis une détonation assourdissante qui coïncide avec un "spot" sur le visage d'un homme affreusement blessé à la tête. (*Procès 13*)

This stylized act of shooting occurs twice more before the three victims identify themselves as bosses at the Dutron Company, but the entire dramatic sequence will recur at two more points in the first act of the play when Jean-Baptiste, who is being cruelly tormented by the juror-witnesses, explodes under the maddening pressure of their raucous assaults and seizes his imaginary rifle (imaginary only insofar as we are supposedly in a court where J.-B. is accused of murder) and repeats his original crimes in a type of hallucinatory outburst. This sequence of three murders will be repeated a fourth time towards the end of Act Two, at which point it signals the end of J.-B.'s testimony and brings the pathetic story of his little life full circle. The final pages of the play stand, therefore, outside this vicious circle, but because they also contain the court's verdict and J.-B.'s sentence they serve to remind us that we, like J.-B. are condemned to relive this sordid, futile sequence of events, *perhaps* in perpetuity.

The entire first act is devoted to J.-B.'s monologue before the court. He rehearses the events of his life — his birth, rejection by his domineering, castrating father, his failure at various jobs, his sex life, his previous criminal record — in a kind of merry-go-round manner, with jury members jumping up to play certain roles. Shifts from one moment in his life to another are signalled by little more than percussion sounds and the repeated commands of the court Crier:

Messieurs, la cour!  
 (*Percussions.*)  
 La société contre Jean-Baptiste M.  
 Pour avoir tiré  
 par trois fois  
 pour avoir privé  
 3 familles de leur support,  
 pour avoir lésé  
 une grande société,  
 pour avoir dérangé  
 l'ordre accepté,  
 En ce jour de grâce  
 1972.  
 Le procès continue,  
 que chaque soit libre  
 de dire ce qu'il sait,  
 de dire ce qu'il pense,  
 de faire ce qu'il doit  
 pour que la justice triomphe. (*Procès 21-22*)

As this chant suggests, these court proceedings are a kind of nightmare distortion of reality, and the satirical effect is heightened still further by the presentational acting and constant interchange of roles: the actor who plays a juror at one point

is a witness at another; the actor who plays a murdered boss also plays a judge (and there are three of these judges who indulge in lengthy, stylized chants about the Dutron Corporation). To make matters still more anti-naturalistic, the character of J.-B. splits and multiplies at key points during his court monologue. For example, at the end of Act One, the irony of J.-B.'s co-option by the system he thought he was attacking is underscored when all the Jean-Baptiste M.'s chant the praises of Dutron and list its products in a screaming crescendo of trade names.

**A**S SHOULD BE CLEAR BY NOW, Gurik's expressionism is considerably more abstract and satirical than Ryga's. It is impossible, finally, to feel much of anything for J.-B., in part because he has accepted so completely the terms of his exploiters and in part because of Gurik's almost comic handling of roles. At one point in the text, Gurik calls for masks for his judges (*Procès* 38), and it is not difficult to imagine how effective masks (a very popular device amongst expressionist playwrights from Kaiser to O'Neill) would be in creating a grotesque, yet comic effect on the stage. In many other ways as well *Le Procès* is a splendid example of an abstracted expressionist play: Gurik exploits a number of expressionist stage effects from sound, lighting, masks, and sets to stylized speech and multiple role acting; he uses the expressionist monologue to great effect to represent J.-B.'s extreme torment *and* to depict, by contrasting his futile passion with the mechanical 'world' around him, the increasing dehumanization of man (see *Le Procès* 65). The highly paratactic structure of Act One is the perfect vehicle for presenting the "stations" of his pathetic life and this parataxis is strengthened by the obsessive repetition of many speeches, sound effects, gestures (such as struggles with the rifle), and situations.

But perhaps the most interesting feature of Gurik's expressionism is his hero and the theme that is articulated through J.-B.'s behaviour. Certainly, this "monsieur-tout-le-monde" is in direct conflict with the paternalistic order of society which is stridently represented by his father, his bosses, and his apparent adviser and friend Robillard. Predictably, he runs afoul of the authoritarian system of capitalist mechanization and industrialization that reduces all workers to slaves. But contrary to Kaiser's *Gas II*, where the entire system is destroyed, or to Fritz Lang's film, *Metropolis*, where a sentimental reconciliation is achieved between workers and bosses, Gurik's J.-B., like Rice's Mr. Zero, simply fails; he fails in his attempt to commit suicide (unlike Kaiser's Cashier in *Von Morgens bis Mitternachts*), he fails to make any impression on the system, to effect change or improve conditions, and he fails to win dignity or respect for his act.

Running through *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* like a refrain is Rita's cry that she's "scared," scared of white authority, of the city, of the general threat surrounding



her existence. She shifts back and forth between bewilderment and defiance, from asking forlornly “Why am I here? What’ve I done?” (*Ecstasy* 72) to making her own accusations:

Go tell your God . . . when you see him [she shouts at the Priest] . . . Tell him about Rita Joe an’ what they done to her! Tell him about yourself, too! . . . That you were not good enough for me, but that didn’t stop you tryin’! Tell him that! (*Ecstasy* 83)

Her wants are, in fact, very simple — safety above all, respect, love, security, a place where she can have and raise her own babies.

J.-B.’s desires are not greatly different. He lists them in a speech that he first makes to the projected image of his threatening father and later repeats twice more in the play:

Je les aurai tes culottes [de son père]. Moi aussi j’aurai une femme, des enfants, une maison, des meubles, une voiture. (*Procès* 21)

Like Jaimie Paul, he only wants to be a man, and he believes he has all the requisites:

Tu voulais que j’devienne un homme? en bien j’en serai un! J’ai tout ce qui faut pour devenir heureux, je suis en santé, je suis assez intelligent, je sais lire, écrire, compter, je parle bien l’anglais. . . . (*Procès* 21)

The crucial distinction between these two plays arises from the different handling of expressionist vocabulary in each. Despite the many similarities between their two protagonists, Ryga shapes his material in order to involve us emotionally in Rita Joe’s fate, while Gurik keeps us at an ironic distance from J.-B. And despite both writers’ concern for documentary elements<sup>14</sup> and their unequivocal critique of an abusive legal and social system, neither offers an answer or much hope. But where Ryga insists on and manipulates our empathetic involvement in his play, Gurik intellectualizes our response through abstraction and satire. These differences, however, are more ones of degree than of kind because in both plays the audience/reader must judge the injustices of a system in which we all participate, either as helpless victims like Rita Joe and Jaimie Paul or as blind, co-opted victims like J.-B. And in both plays the central, tormented figure (albeit more fleshed-out in *Ecstasy* than in *Procès*) is at once our representative in the world and the lens through which we see that world.

This consideration of the “heroes” leads to a final observation about these plays. Unlike some plays in the German repertoire, where the hero is idealized as the carrier of the *Vision* for mankind’s regeneration, in our plays, as in so many plays of the sixties and early seventies, such a hopeful vision is no longer tenable. It has become harder and harder to articulate convincing alternatives to the system within which we live, harder even to identify (as both Rita Joe and J.-B. realize) who is

responsible for our suffering and dehumanization. There is, however, one further way of accounting for the problematic endings of both plays, and that is to place them in the line proceeding from Kaiser's *Von Morgens bis Mitternachts*, Toller's *Masse Mensch*, O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*, and Rice's *The Adding Machine* (not to mention Armand Gatti's *La Vie imaginaire de l'éboueur Auguste G.* and Kafka's *Der Prozess*). Each of these expressionist works, with the exception of Gatti, was well known in North America, and in each the main protagonists come to ignominious, deeply ironic ends; their deaths like their lives change nothing.<sup>15</sup> Where these plays, and with them *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* and *Le Procès de Jean-Baptiste M.*, succeed is in their use of an expressionist vocabulary and dramaturgy to make powerful semiotic statements about human existence. In the last analysis, Ryga and Gurik are humanists who through the "international" form of *expressionism* hold the mirror up to our own inner confusions, guilts, and fears. The result is two superbly crafted works for the stage, in Canada or anywhere.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Rolf Hochhuth quoting Schiller in "Sidelights on History," appendix to *The Deputy*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Grove Press, 1964), p. 289.
- <sup>2</sup> For discussion of these developments in the theatre see: Michael Patterson, *The Revolution in the German Theatre, 1900-1933* (Boston and London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), who describes the two tendencies of expressionist drama and stage design as "primitive" and "abstract"; J. L. Styan, *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice 3: Expressionism and Epic Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981); and John Willett, *Expressionism* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970).
- <sup>3</sup> All references to *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* are to the 1970 Talonbooks edition edited by Peter Hay, and all references to *Le Procès de Jean-Baptiste M.* are to the first French edition published by Leméac in 1972. Due to difficulties in obtaining reliable production information and photographs for the key productions of *Ecstasy* or the Quebec premiere and subsequent English-language productions of *Le Procès*, I have limited my discussion to the published texts.
- <sup>4</sup> Quoted in Jean-Cléo Godin and Laurent Maillot, *Théâtre Québécois II* (Lasalle, Québec: Éditions Hurtubise, 1980), p. 787.
- <sup>5</sup> See Kandinsky's *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (1914), trans. M. T. H. Sadler as *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (New York: Dover, 1977), p. 26, and Georg Kaiser's *Vision und Figur* (1918), quoted in *Georg Kaiser* by B. J. Kenworthy (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1957), pp. 35-37.
- <sup>6</sup> In *Recordings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1985), Hal Foster discusses what he calls the "expressive fallacy" of expressionist and neo-expressionist art. He points out that the expressionist artist mistakenly believes that he or she is expressing an unmediated and uncoded self whereas "even as expressionism insists on the primary, originary, interior self, it reveals that this self is never anterior to its traces, its gestures. . . . they speak him rather more than he expresses them" (62). Many expressionist artists and theorists insisted that, because their art expresses an individual, subjective response to or perspective on reality, it can have no single definitive style, but the unresolvable tension created by the desire for

expressive anteriority in the face of rhetorical, generic, and psychological conventions and codes is a major stumbling-block for expressionist theory and practice.

- <sup>7</sup> I have taken the terms "empathy" and "abstraction" from Wilhelm Worringer's important study *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (München: Piper Verlag, 1948), first published in 1908.
- <sup>8</sup> The most famous plays in the tribunal mode are Peter Weiss's *Der Ermittlung* (1965), drawn from the Auschwitz trials, Heinar Kipphardt's *In der Sache J. Robert Oppenheimer* (1964), Hans Magnus Enzensberger's *Das Verhör von Habana* (1970), and Donald Freed's *The Inquest* (1970). Notable amongst the precursors for these plays is the work of Georg Büchner, both *Dantons Tod* and *Woyzeck* which were very popular during the twenties and through the sixties and seventies in North America. For discussion of the tribunal tradition see Clas Zilliacus, "Documentary Drama: Form and Content," *Comparative Drama*, VI, i (1972), 223-53, and C. W. E. Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), Part V, "The Theatre of Commitment." See also: William C. Reeve, "Büchner's *Woyzeck* on the English-Canadian Stage," and Jerry Wasserman, "Büchner in Canada: *Woyzeck* and the Development of English-Canadian Theatre" in *Theatre History in Canada*, 8, 2 (1987), 169-80 and 181-92. Wasserman discusses the likely influence of Büchner on Ryga and the parallels between *Woyzeck* and *Ecstasy* at length, see pp. 189-91.
- <sup>9</sup> See Christopher Innes, *Politics and the Playwright: George Ryga* (Toronto: Simon and Pierre, 1985), p. 19. Innes describes Ryga's echoes of O'Neill on p. 48. For comments on Ryga's relationship to Brecht, see "An Interview with George Ryga" conducted by Jill Martinez in *Politics and Literature*, a special issue of *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, 35/36 (1986), 106-20; and for a political reading of the play, see Gary Boire, "Wheels on Fire: The Train of Thought in George Ryga's *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*," *Canadian Literature*, 113-14 (1987), 62-74.
- <sup>10</sup> In *Le fou et ses doubles* (Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1978), p. 145, Pierre Gobin notes the importance of Gatti for Gurik, but see also Gurik's comments in J.-C. Germain's "Robert Gurik: l'auteur qui n'a rien à enseigner," *Digeste Éclair* (November 1968), pp. 17-20. Gatti's 1962 play, *La Vie imaginaire de l'éboueur Auguste G.*, presents the hallucinated recollections and reimaginings of his life by the dying garbage-man, Auguste, who has been fatally wounded by the police during a strike. See *Gatti aujourd'hui* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1970) by Gérard Gozlan and Jean-Louis Pays.
- <sup>11</sup> Elmer Rice was second only to O'Neill during the first half of this century, and many would say that he wrote better expressionist plays than the master. Certainly, *The Adding Machine*, first produced in 1923, enjoyed considerable success and continued to be performed over the years. In *The Independance of Elmer Rice* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1965), pp. 146-47, Robert Hogan lists the number of Rice productions between 1958 and 1963. Unfortunately, he does not say where they took place, but in *Seven Plays by Elmer Rice* Canada is listed as one of the countries where *The Adding Machine* was performed. Although much more hypotactic in structure than Gurik's *Procès*, it nonetheless captures a similar satiric tone through its abstraction and circularity; the hero, Mr. Zero, also shoots his boss, but like Jean-Baptiste he ends up being recycled back into the same sort of world he thought he was resisting and escaping. Moreover, his fate is in large part his own fault; he is too stupid, too timorous and easily deceived by life to be able to see through the illusions that surround him. In this, too, he is like Jean-Baptiste.

- <sup>12</sup> "Is There a Canadian Drama?" appeared in *The Canadian Imagination*, ed. David Staines (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 152-87. Recently there have been a number of very fine anthologies with good critical introductions and some monographs on individual playwrights. In 1987 Eugene Benson and Len Conolly published *English-Canadian Theatre* (Toronto: Oxford Univ. Press) and Conolly edited *Canadian Drama and the Critics* (Vancouver: Talonbooks). For studies of Quebec drama see Gobin and Godin and Maillot in nn. 4 and 10.
- <sup>13</sup> See, for example, Ernst Toller's famous expressionist play, *Masse Mensch* (1919), in which more realistic tableaux alternate with lyrical, dream projections without any attempt at logical or spatio-temporal justification or connection.
- <sup>14</sup> According to Innes (p. 41), Ryga intercut dramatic material with actual news reports, statistics, and government reports in the third draft of *Ecstasy*, and documentary elements continued to be very important to him, in *Sunrise on Sarah*, for example. Gurik is more coy in his use of documentary material. He does refer to contemporary taxi and airport limousine feuds in his play, and at the beginning of Act Two he has two spectators arrive at J.-B.'s trial with newspapers in which they are reading about his crimes — a nice meta-documentary touch.
- <sup>15</sup> For a fuller discussion of the German expressionist's ambivalent attitude towards the "New Man," and hence towards the chief protagonist of his play, see B. J. Kenworthy, "Georg Kaiser: The Ambiguity of the Expressionist New Man" in *Georg Kaiser Symposium*, eds. Holger Pausch and Ernest Reinhold (Berlin: Agora Verlag, 1980), pp. 95-111.

## BROWN'S POND

*David Carpenter*

Off Plymouth yesterday  
 a whale calf breached, tail  
 flukes raised in vast playfulness.  
 Alongside, freighter-slow,  
 its mother passed, callosities  
 for running lights  
 in foggy Massachusetts Bay.

On the mainland  
 tourists belittled the Rock,  
 crushed Salems beneath their feet,  
 complained and  
 complained.

Here at Brown's Pond  
 tree swallows flit,  
 splash, fish.