

Arts

The struggle of an orthodox métis jew

By SHIN DIG
and CAR CRASH

Harold McKinnon, one of Canada's new generation of unknown poetic surrealist playwrights, has just finished his latest masterpiece of Canadiana, *Revolution in Lonesome Butte, Saskatchewan*. *Excalibur* and the York community have been fortunate to receive exclusive rights to this brilliant work. The following will provide McKinnon fans with a glimpse into the contours of this soon to be legendary effort.

Revolution in Lonesome Butte, Saskatchewan documents the titanic struggle of disenchanted nationalist Avraham St. Laurent (one-third

Métis, two-thirds Jew) to realize his dream of an independent banana republic for the useless town of Lonesome Butte. St. Laurent's challenge includes a brutal internal struggle of attempting to reconcile himself with his jaded past, as his great grandfather's best friend's aunt was the sister-in-law of Louis Riel's mistress. McKinnon's character development is flawless as he deftly maintains St. Laurent's Judaism while he fights for Lonesome Butte's eternal day in the sun.

Act 1 Scene 2 set in St. Laurent's barn, on his vast ranch, is an example of McKinnon's staggering research abilities interwoven into

exquisite surrealistic drama. Avraham and his revolutionary coterie consisting of Luc and Tortierre are plotting their fourth coup d'état in a period of two weeks. The revolt will be launched from the basement of Agudath Métis, Lonesome Butte's largest Orthodox synagogue.

Avraham: Luc do you have the weapons.

Luc: (exasperated) I thought you did!
Avraham: (in disgust) Great. And you Tortierre did you forget the meatpies?

Tortierre: (awakened by Avraham's vehemence) Huh! Long live Lonesome Butte! Long live the Western Métis vanguard proletarian institutional party!

Avraham and Luc, suddenly losing their composure, catch each other's gaze, take a meat pie and begin to cry. Outside a horse whinnies. It begins to rain, a light gentle drizzle. Eventually the barn collapses. The scene ends.

Act 2 Scene 43 illustrates McKinnon's innate understanding of the human psyche as he splices love, fear and sexual savagery to the valiant revolutionary struggle. Avraham, and his lover, Helga, are meeting secretly once again amidst the tall wheat stalks of the endless Saskatchewan prairie.

Helga: I love you Avraham. I especially love the way your ear lobes gesticulate as you disclose your subversive despotic plans.



The mob rules: Lonesome Butte in their pre-revolutionary fervour gathering outside Mordecai Ben-Croissant's antique shop.

Avraham: You ain't seen nothing yet, baby.

Helga: (startled by Avraham referring to her as baby) Avraham I'm frightened.

Avraham: Why, my love, I'm here with you.

Caught by the moment's passion they rip each other's clothes off and gallop romantically through the fields. Helga trips on a groundhog hole, shattering her leg. The scene ends.

Act 3 Scene 4 reflects McKinnon's political acumen as he skillfully manipulates the legitimate grievances of Lonesome Butte's "pissed off" masses. Using the brutal power of their own inertia, the mob, running at breathtaking speed, tramples all vestiges of the municipality's previous ruling strata. Monuments are destroyed, buildings crumble like cardboard, traffic lights are pulled asunder. Suddenly, the crowd, realizing that they are destroying their own town, stops and sullenly proceeds home. In their glee, Avraham, Luc, and Tortierre hug each other, catching the confused rabble's attention. People begin to stare, the scene ends.

Act 4 Scene 65 provides a good example of the diversity of McKinnon's style. He dexteriously includes the inanities of daily existence into the serious business of consolidating a revolution.

Luc: What happened Avraham, You're a mess! This revolution is really taking its toll.

Avraham: Revolution spevolution. I cut myself shaving this morning and in my haste to get here this morning I forgot to comb my hair. (Conceding to the scornful looks of his friends) O.K. so I lost my brush and mirror, big deal.

Tortierre: Leave him alone Luc, sometimes you're such a bully!

Luc: You always side with him. It really sticks in my craw!

Avraham: Enough of this idle chatter. Anybody for an espresso?

Avraham and Luc: (simultaneously) O.K. (The scene ends)

Act 5 Scene 102. McKinnon is never predictable, his conclusions always seem to startle the audience. Despite the non-fictional nature of the legendary Lonesome Butte revolt, McKinnon breathes life into the episode through his brilliant character development and thematic finish. The scene takes place in the elliptical office on the second floor of the stately Lonesome Butte city hall. Premier Avraham St. Laurent, First Lady Helga, and his trusted henchmen Luc and Tortierre, argue over political philosophy.

Luc: Tortierre and I have been discussing the disposal of an additional 100 people. We suggest dropping the scum into barrels of chemical fertilizer, then they will get a taste of their own medicine. (Reveling in their own perversity, Luc and Tortierre break into hysterics.)

Premier Avraham: (showing his great statesmanship) Luc, Tortierre, there are only 104 people left in the town, including us. Don't you think you've gone a bit too far?

Tortierre: With all due respect Mr. Premier, forget it. We're going to annihilate every last remnant of humanity in Lonesome Butte. (Luc stands up and cheers. Helga, stunned by the transformation of Luc and Tortierre's character, faints and dies.)

Premier Avraham: (gasping) Gasp! (Filled with rage at the death of his beloved Helga, he picks both Luc and Tortierre up by the shirt and tosses them off the balcony. For good measure, he grabs his handy M-16 and blows them to pieces. A crowd gathers and rejoices. Premier Avraham slumps in exhaustion. End of play.)



Nice dentures: Avraham St. Laurent, swashbuckling leader of the Lonesome Butte revolution, smiling after his Bar-Mitzvah

Beckett: A place of taste

By ROBERT PRYER

The Samuel Beckett Theatres' presentation of Sam (the intelligent woman Beefcake) Shepard's *Curse of the Starving Class* saw the triumph of artistic interpretation over censorship. Thank God it isn't necessary to question the standards by which the actor playing Wesley was allowed to urinate on the stage in the first act but remain fully clothed during the crucial, though innocuous, nude appearance in Act Three.

In this very short, nude appearance Wesley is supposed to enter from stage left, walk across the stage with a dazed expression, pick up a lamb (just pick it up), and exit stage right. A director attempting a straight forward consistent interpretation of Mr. Shepard's play could have preserved its' meaning and, at the same time, have drawn attention to the fact that the director was being censored, by having Wesley appear wearing, let's say, just his underwear. This production of the very

nature of drama rather than preserving any silly old point Mr. Shepard may have wanted to get across.

Within this context, one does not wonder why the character, Sergeant Malcolm, (played by the director himself) is leering at the audience; one applauds his distance from the drama. The most brilliant denial of meaning occurs at the conclusion of the final act. The theme of self-destruction should be concluded by Wesley's description of the midair fight between the tom cat and the eagle. In Shepard's work, Wesley says: "And that eagle comes down and picks up the cat in his talons . . ." Compare this ridiculously clear statement to the Beckett productions' opening night version of: "that eagle comes down and picks up the eagle in his talons" and the full self-reflexive intention of the director leaves the audience gasping.

Other revisions are too numerous to mention, but it must be said that they were all similarly bold in their



Sam Shepard 'dramatized'.

originality. With the *Curse of the Starving Class* production, the Samuel Beckett Theatre has eclipsed its mandate as an alternative to the mainstream theatre offered by the York Theatre Department. It is now simply an alternative to dramatic theatre.

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