

**BETTY LAMBERT'S PLAYS FOR CHILDREN:
A FEMINIST APPROACH TO THEATRE FOR
YOUNG AUDIENCES**

by

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Abstract

English Canadian playwright, Betty Lambert, the focus of this thesis, started writing children's plays in the 1960's. These plays reflect her feminist ideals that became prominent in her later work, such as in her best-known play, *Jennie's Story*. Analyzing Lambert's *The Riddle Machine* and *Song of the Serpent*, the relationship between feminism and theatre for young audiences can be discerned by looking at methods of realism, moral education and gender, and "empowerment through the idea of "Truth." These are explored using a combination of Bertolt Brecht and Augusto Boal's writings on theatre, Dorothy Heathcote's ideas on drama and education, and Lawrence Kohlberg and Carole Gilligan's theories of 'moral education.' Using analysis of Lambert's children's plays, my thesis proves the importance of provoking a feminist consciousness from a young age to disrupt gender stereotypes and inspire children to pursue their goals. I speculate on how Lambert's plays can inform contemporary theatre.

Keywords: Betty Lambert; children's plays; feminist theatre; drama in education

Dedication

To Betty

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Betty Lambert's Plays for Children

Introduction

"I was told that women don't go to university and women don't become writers. Only the rich could be writers" (Lambert qtd. Twigg).

At the time Betty Lambert (1933-1983) died, she was considered one of the best Canadian playwrights of her day and would have contributed a great deal more to the English Canadian theatrical tradition had her life not been tragically cut short (Wasserman 172). Lambert was an author, playwright, professor and self-identified feminist best remembered for plays written for adult audiences addressing controversial subjects such as rape, racism and sexual violence, notably *Sqrieux-De-Dieu*¹ (1975), *Clouds of Glory*² (1980), *Jennie's Story* (1981) and *Under the Skin*³ (1985) produced posthumously. During her lifetime, Lambert received significant public recognition. She won an ACTRA Nellie⁴ award in 1980 for Best Radio Drama for the partially autobiographical *Grasshopper Hill* (1979).

¹ *Sqrieux-De-Dieu* is best described as a 'sexual popular comedy'.

² *Clouds of Glory* is set at a fictional University evocative of Simon Fraser University around the time of the War Measures Act. The title also points to Aristophanes' Greek Comedy *The Clouds*.

³ *Under the Skin* is usually included in the list of her best works, however, this is sometimes contested as it is often considered unfinished because it was produced from a draft two year's after Lambert's death.

⁴ ACTRA is the Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Arts representing performers in English-Language media. Today it represents over 18,000 performers in television, radio and film. The ACTRA Awards were first presented in 1972. The Nellie award was named after Nellie McClung and was awarded to exceptional feminist artists until 1986.

Jennie's Story won a Chalmers⁵ award in 1981 and a nomination for a Governor General's⁶ award in 1983 for best stage play. This play, which has been produced internationally and was adapted into the screenplay *Heart of the Sun* (1999), is included in the 1993 anthology *Fifteen Plays from Canadian Theatre Review* where Lambert is one of four women in a roster of eighteen playwrights. Before this period of writing, she wrote plays for young audiences that reflected her feminist ideals which were echoed in her later and better-known work. Theatre for young audiences in the 1960s innovated in having a message to share with its audience. This trend started in England, moving through the United States and finally into Canada. It is Lambert's work of this early period that is the particular focus of this thesis which will consider various theories, including Bertolt Brecht's (1898-1956) theatrical theories, Dorothy Heathcote's (1926-) 'Drama and Education', Carol Gilligan's (1936-) 'Ethics of Care'- which developed out of Laurence Kohlberg's (1927-1987) 'Moral Education', and Augusto Boal's (1931-) 'Theatre of the Oppressed', alongside a feminist reading of Lambert's children's plays.

Betty Lambert first published her first short story, *So Much More* in 1947, the year after her father died. She described her social standing as moving from "working class" to "welfare class" on this occasion: "Writing

⁵ The Chalmers award is a Canadian arts award funded by the Chalmers family. Lambert received the Floyd S. Chalmers Canadian Play award. Chalmers Awards were presented from 1973-1983.

⁶ The Governor General's Literary Awards have been presented since 1937. It is considered to be the most prestigious literary prize that can be won in Canada.

was a way out but soon it became more than that, it became a necessity” (Lambert qtd. Twigg). Born and raised in Calgary, she spent a summer at the Banff School for Fine Arts studying creative writing, moving to Vancouver when she was 18 to study Philosophy and English at the University of British Columbia. After receiving her B.A., Lambert received a grant from the Canada Council to study Greek Theatre in Epidaurus⁷. During this time she represented Canada at a meeting of the International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People in France, perhaps the beginning of her interest in writing stage plays for children and youth (Cranmer-Byng and Rubin 101).

It was when Lambert returned to Canada that she began to write plays, around thirty of which were produced by CBC Radio. *The Riddle Machine*, her first work written for the stage, was later produced throughout the United States, notably at the Jack and Jill Theater in Chicago, the Pittsburgh Playhouse, and Young People’s Theatreworks in Northampton, Massachusetts. The National Jeudtheater in Belgium also bought the rights for production after the play’s Canadian National Tour. Neither of her other plays for children, including ‘the gold rush melodrama,’ *Song of the Serpent*, were produced outside of Vancouver (Cranmer-Byng and Rubin 102). *The Riddle Machine* and *Song of the Serpent* are the only two plays for children written by Lambert that have

⁷ Epidaurus (or Epidavros) is a city in Greece on the Saronic Gulf.

been published. *World, World, Go Away*⁸, performed in 1970 remains unpublished, but can be found in the library archives at both the University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University.

When Lambert found out she was dying of lung and liver cancer she wrote around the clock for nine months until her death on November 4, 1983. She wrote to friend and colleague Joy Coghill, “I have so much to do and no time to die”. During her lifetime, Lambert was one of a handful of Canadian women playwrights to consistently create significant work. However, as Susan Steadman states in *Dramatic Re-visions: an Annotated Bibliography of Feminism and Theatre 1972-1988*, “Lambert’s success in having productions mounted is contrasted with her failure to overcome sexist critical reaction to her plays” (124). Of the more than 75 plays she wrote in her lifetime, Lambert labelled most of her work as feminist. As a result, Lambert was credited for expressing through her writing the anger felt by many women of her time. She is celebrated for combining intense plots with profound characterization as well as intellectual themes with deep emotion, particularly in her last two plays (Wasserman 173).

As an associate professor at Simon Fraser University, Lambert’s teaching interests included Shakespeare, linguistics and Greek drama. Through her last two adult plays, Lambert sought to redefine tragedy and break the code laid out by Aristotle in order to envision a ‘female tragic

⁸ *World, World, Go Away* references the Vietnam War.

form'. In tragedies as Lambert knew them, women had no power to instigate change; they usually committed suicide in response to overwhelming circumstances, leaving a place available to be simply filled by another woman (Kerr 98). Lambert's work frequently addresses relationships between women, clearly illustrating that she is opposed to competition between them. Using the "female tragic form", Lambert wanted women's lives to be viewed through an alternate lens to the standard male perspective and to interrogate the position of women in society (Kerr 103).

Lambert's plays for children are prime examples of the potential for overlap between feminism and theatre for young audiences, as Lambert claims to have written her children's pieces from the same place of emotion and struggle as when she wrote for adult audiences. Malcolm Page asserts in the foreword to *Three Radio Plays* "Betty Lambert's children's plays pioneered the introduction of serious subjects, instead of fairy tales" (3). Lambert's work thus presents an ideal space to explore children's relationships to theatre, and theatre's potential as a pedagogic tool, specifically a feminist pedagogic tool, which is the focus of this thesis. Furthermore, as Canada is a fairly young country it does not have extensive theatre history to draw from. Thus, scholarly work focused on Canadian feminist theatre is rare, and discussion of Canadian feminist theatre focused towards young audiences virtually non-existent. At a conference in

Vancouver in 1981 entitled “Women and Words,” it was announced that up until that year less than 10% of published playwrights in Canada were women (Betty’s Story).

According to O’Connor, when theatre for young audiences is employed as a pedagogic tool, it is rarely used with the intention of presenting simple solutions to children and youth about the challenges they face. Rather, theatre seeks to promote awareness and provide a structured environment where audiences can deal with issues pertinent to young people. Furthermore, theatre allows children and youth space to reflect upon events in their lives through the experiences of the protagonist(s) of the play (236). Lambert’s work for young audiences subscribes to this method.

To explore Betty Lambert’s legacy as a feminist playwright writing for young audiences, I will discuss two of Lambert’s children’s plays: *The Riddle Machine*, first produced in 1966, and *Song of the Serpent*, first produced in 1967. *The Riddle Machine* was written for a children age 5-12 at a time when ‘magical realism’ was a popular writing style. Aimed at this large spectrum of children, it was very successful when produced at Expo ’67 in Montreal. Performances by Holiday Theatre at the Metro Theatre house in Vancouver in 1966, directed by Joy Coghill, were similarly successful. Coghill has also been credited with much of the positive response to the play. The action takes place on a space ship as five children

travel to the new world. They are in the care of a robot and must correctly answer a riddle in order to cross into the new world, a scenario that has been read as a metaphor for growing up, or coming into adulthood.

In contrast, *Song of the Serpent*, first directed by Jane Heyman also by Holiday Theatre presented at the Metro Theatre in Vancouver in 1967, was written for a slightly older audience, 9-15 year olds, and did not receive the same success as *The Riddle Machine*. *Song of the Serpent* toured schools in British Columbia in 1973. It is a gold rush-inspired adventure-melodrama, with clear-cut heroes, villains and a happy ending. Perhaps this typical plot device could not consistently hold the interest of the audience. While it was anthologized by Gordon Ralph as a play intended for study in classrooms in 1995's *Boneman*, its lack of critical acclaim was reflected in overall opinions of the anthology, which was described as a "poorly chosen" selection of plays, each of which were "ploddingly predictable" (Knowles 270).

Lambert's plays for young audiences are hinged around the theme of gaining responsibility, specifically the agency acquired in the process of growing up. While this is seen in answering the riddle in *The Riddle Machine*, it is also evident in Jason, the protagonist's, physical and metaphorical journey in *Song of the Serpent*.

I decided to focus my research on these two plays, of Lambert's three plays specifically written for children, for a variety of reasons. The first is

simply a question of accessibility, not only to the texts themselves but also to reviews of the plays from the original productions. More reviews are available for *The Riddle Machine* and *Song of the Serpent* than for *World, World Go Away*. As well, though all three plays are relatively similar in terms of devices, such as an outsider protagonist, physical and metaphorical journeys which follow the trajectory of the plot, etc, *The Riddle Machine* and *Song of the Serpent* have the least amount in common, thus making the process of locating Lambert's feminism in these plays more interesting. However, in terms of form they are the two most similar which lends them well to comparison. *World, World Go Away* fosters an interactive audience. Though there are elements that can be interactive in the other plays, active participation is not a necessity. While *The Riddle Machine* and *Song of the Serpent* are opposed in terms of public reception, I think the unpopular *Song of the Serpent* demonstrates Lambert's desire to convey her feminist politics to young audiences just as her *The Riddle Machine* targets an audience of children. In fact, ideas that can be traced to Lambert's feminism may be part of the reason *Song of the Serpent* was not as popular. Lambert questions gender role stereotypes in her plays for young audiences and this is much more obvious in *Song of the Serpent* than it is in *The Riddle Machine*, although this theme is still present in that play, something I hope to prove in my thesis. Further, my thesis will prove that a clear relationship between feminism and theatre for

young audiences is important, if not essential. When juxtaposed with feminist motivation, theatre has the potential to be a powerful tool to connect individuals.

Theoretical Framework

In order to get a good look at the potential of Betty Lambert's children's plays, it is important to analyze her writing in terms of a variety of theories that, when combined, can demonstrate the educational and political potential of theatre. By doing this, it is clear that *The Riddle Machine* and *Song of the Serpent* reflected and sought to communicate some of Lambert's feminist ideals while being entertaining plays for children. These ideals include equality, reciprocity and fairness within all different kinds of relationships. By considering together the theatrical theories of Bertolt Brecht (1898-1958), Dorothy Heathcote's (1926-) 'Drama and Education', Carol Gilligan's (1936-) 'Ethics of Care'— which developed out of Laurence Kohlberg's (1927-1987) 'Moral Education', and Augusto Boal's (1931-) 'Theatre of the Oppressed', a well rounded analysis of Lambert's children's plays can be conducted. This is what I hope my thesis will accomplish.

Methods of Realism

Theatre for young audiences and the theatrical influences of Bertolt Brecht are closely connected. Brecht perceived his plays to be realist⁹,

⁹ *Brecht on Theatre*, 1964..

despite the inclusion of song as a form of expression, and other theatrical means rarely seen in everyday life. Brecht's realism purposefully opposed the methods of Konstantin Stanislavski (1863-1938) and Anton Chekhov (1860-1904), who popularized "Theatrical Realism". The object of the latter was to give the audience the impression they were watching a piece of everyday life¹⁰. Theatrical realism seeks to carefully justify the actions of characters resulting in plot twists. Great emphasis is placed on developing the rational thought pattern for the characters in order for the audience to accept what is happening as plausible, or realistic. In contrast, Brecht perceived the world as disorderly and irrational, which he demonstrated onstage through his characters and plots.

To attain his notion of realism, everything happening onstage in a Brecht play *was* indeed real. Brecht did not attempt to conceal any theatrical means, such as lighting instruments, musicians or scene changes during performances. This was in contrast with the popular realist theatre of his time that had tried to uphold the 'magic of theatre' and maintain an element of mystery for its spectators. By keeping these aspects of the performance visible and simple, according to Brecht, it was impossible to confuse the events of the play with those in real life.

This foregrounding of theatrical means was part of the 'Verfremdungseffekt' or, loosely translated, the 'Alienation Effect', Brecht's

¹⁰ Realism continues to dominate popular theatre since breaking away from highly stylized forms that were popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries

best-known theatrical legacy. This was a very different technique from what was usually employed in theatrical realism. Rather than encouraging the audience to easily get caught up in what was happening to characters onstage, thus creating a passive audience 'along for the ride', Brecht's plays encouraged the audience to think critically about what they were seeing. Ultimately by means of the Alienation Effect, Brecht wished the audience to engage with the events of the performance in relation to their own social position outside the theatre, and then, ideally, those thoughts would snowball to instigate social change. Lambert also wished to leave the audience considering what they had seen onstage outside the context of the theatre. This will be elaborated on in Chapters 4 and 5 when I will conduct my analysis of her work.

Dorothy Heathcote, focusing on children, similarly endorsed the idea that individuals could increase their understanding of the world through being audience members at a play, proposing that theatrical experience could influence children's development into becoming adults¹¹. Heathcote asserts that children's skills of observation and communication are trained as members of an audience¹². This idea is similar to what Brecht hoped to

¹¹ Before Heathcote, theatre for children had never been considered as anything more than a social occasion and was rarely encouraged with zeal. *Dorothy Heathcote: collected writings on Education and Drama*, 1945.

¹² These skills could then be applied to real world experiences, potentially resulting in constructive reactions to difficult situations, either 'fed' to the children explicitly in performance (the moral of the story) or through problem solving skills honed through audience participation by identifying with the hero or heroine onstage.

achieve with the Alienation Effect, though he hoped to move past training the audience to observe what was happening to action outside the theatre.

As previously noted, Brecht's concept of realism was calculated to oppose what theatrical realism then embodied. Realism before Brecht was preoccupied with making an accurate representation. For example, if a play was set in the 1600's, period costumes closely resembling the clothing of the time would be essential to a piece of realistic theatre. Brecht, however, was more concerned with the issues in a play being accurate, relevant and pertinent to the audience's social reality. Brecht made no attempt to 'trick' the audience into thinking what they were witnessing was a piece of everyday life.

Heathcote's notion of realism differed in that it specified that in order for a play to be an effective means of teaching the audience, it had to construct its own plausible reality. Providing that all actions make sense within the context of the play, then it is realistic according to Heathcote.

The two plays of Lambert's I have selected to study are entrenched in fantasy. We have, for example, yet to reach a world where robots take on caregiver roles, and we rarely hear of ancient spirits killing off the bad guys outside of myth and legend. However, Lambert's plays establish what is possible in their world whose dynamics as Brecht suggests, accurately reflect social reality, and then play within that framework. The children can always recognize that what they are seeing is not real life because

Lambert's plays are also set up like those of Brecht. Lambert incorporates "exercise points" and openly shares the magic behind a play. Joy Coghill explained "exercise points" in our interview. In order to hold the attention of young children the pace of the action in a play must vary every six to seven minutes¹³. This is the official purpose of the "exercise points" but they lend themselves well to Brechtian interpretation. In Lambert's children's plays these "exercise points" usually take the form of song an aspect that will be explored in greater depth in the chapters dealing with the respective plays. Like Brechtian examples, these songs are where some of the most stirring messages from Lambert's work for young audiences can be located.

Moral Education and Gender

Both Laurence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan were interested in what influences a person's moral choices. Kohlberg argued that we are responsible to abstract concepts like 'justice' or 'integrity' and we have the responsibility to achieve a state where autonomous altruist actions are possible. Gilligan's position differed in that she proposed that, rather than acting autonomously as we negotiate our actions as Kohlberg assumed, the thoughts of our peers do have clout. Gilligan argues that the community context is the space where acting morally is of the greatest importance.

¹³ Coghill learned the importance of varying the pacing in a script from British theatre for young audiences practitioner Brian Way.

She believes that people do not make decisions independently, feeling accountable only to notions of 'justice' and 'integrity', but make decisions with their responsibility to a group of others in mind (Gosselin 93). For example, if a couple share a cat, it is rare that one person will make a decision about the cat's life without the other person's consent.

In response to Kohlberg's studies, Gilligan explored the relationship between gender and moral education. (Kohlberg had conducted his research only on samples of men, whereas Gilligan, who was a student of Kohlberg, recognized the gender inequality in his work and conducted studies on men and women). Gilligan examines gender difference in regards to care and responsibility for others in her 1982 book, *In a Different Voice*. She discovered that women usually made choices while considering their relationships to smaller communities, such as friends, family or others they care for. According to Gilligan, this social tethering of individuals in the decision making process, can easily become a form of self-inflicted oppression, especially when an individual cannot readily rationalize or explain her/his actions (Gosselin 97). Gilligan's work further suggests that because they cannot readily rationalize their actions, more women than men ignore their own interests.

Both Lawrence Kohlberg's and Carol Gilligan's ideas stem from Jean Piaget's (1896-1980) 'theory of learning and stage theory'. Piaget is credited with pinpointing two ways in which people (children and adults)

learn, assimilating new information and modifying previous conceptions to find a new mental equilibrium. Piaget also defined periods of learning,¹⁴ a notion that was quickly adopted by moral education theorists, including Kohlberg and Gilligan. Piaget argued that “when a person ceases to use reflection to oppose experience and instead uses reflection to predict and interpret reality, they move from adolescence to adulthood” (qtd. in Gosselin 101, and Sutherland 289). This is how most education theorists, including Kohlberg and Gilligan, define the transition from youth to adulthood. Gilligan extended this notion to the idea that maturation was closely connected to becoming aware of relationships and responsibility (Dressel and Molson 212, and Sutherland 286).

Jean Piaget’s periods of learning correspond to the three stages of schooling most young people progress through. The ‘pre-operational’ stage correlates to children in kindergarten and primary school, the ‘concrete operational thought’ stage corresponds to intermediate grades, and the ‘formal operational thought’ stage starts slightly before most youth enter high school. Playwrights for young audiences usually target a play to a particular age group (ranging from ages 3-18) that corresponds with a particular grade, or grades, in school, so the playwright is cognizant of the kinds of thought their audience will, hopefully, be engaging in regarding the subject matter of their play.

¹⁴ These periods are: sensori-motor activity (0-2 years), pre-operational activity (2-7 years), concrete operational thought (7-11 years) and formal operational thought (11 years on).

Kohlberg claimed his theory could be applied cross culturally as he believed that aspects of moral development are culturally universal, arguing that all cultures have common sources of social interaction, role-taking, and social conflict which require moral integration. Gilligan found this to be a problematic stance. She disagreed with Kohlberg using his moral education theories on men and women without directly studying women, and could not agree that his theory was applicable to all cultures without studying all cultures directly, which Kohlberg did not do.

Kohlberg's study proposed six stages of moral development, similar to Piaget's periods of learning. These stages of moral development are divided into three levels: the pre-conventional, the conventional, and the post-conventional. The pre-conventional level revolves around repercussions to oneself from making a decision, what Kohlberg calls 'heteronomous morality' and 'individualistic instrumental morality'. The conventional level takes society's expectations into account, incorporating 'interpersonally normative morality' and 'social system morality'. Finally, the post-conventional level, the highest moral development a person can have, and, according to Kohlberg the moral state every person should aspire to, deals with answering to principles like justice and fairness and includes 'human rights and social welfare morality' and 'morality of universalizable, reversible, and prescriptive general ethical principles'. Both Kohlberg and Gilligan agreed that people make decisions based on how

they judge others have handled similar situations. For example, Gilligan found that when dealing with an unwanted pregnancy, women would consider the outcome that their friends and acquaintances encountered and try to visualize the decision that resulted from that experience in their own lives.

Some of the views Kohlberg developed that Gilligan contested include that religion inhibits the development of moral values. Kohlberg believed that religion results in morality developing outside learned experience, something his theories advocated against. Gilligan's studies are more aware of diversity and have been applied to many groups and disciplines, including those that are religious, children, and education.

Lambert was writing when most of the basic theories surrounding moral education were being developed. As can be seen in her children's plays, *The Riddle Machine* in particular, Lambert was intrigued by the challenges children encounter as they become adults. I hope to prove this in the chapters where I analyze her plays. When Betty Lambert wrote for young audiences her plays were usually targeted at a large age group, but she still targets specific periods of learning as outlined by Piaget, that correlate to the first two levels of Kohlberg's moral development. Because Lambert looks at the concept of responsibility to others in relation to oppression, I think Gilligan's moral theories are a good way to locate the ethics Lambert was trying to leave with her audience to consider.

Heathcote, Kohlberg and Gilligan all believe that learning happens through observation. For Heathcote, children can learn how to handle real life situations by being audience members. For Kohlberg and Gilligan, people make decisions in their own lives based on how they perceive the experiences of others they equate as similar. If the outcome is judged as good, their decision as to how to handle a dilemma will be similar.

If Heathcote, Kohlberg and Gilligan's perspectives on observation are considered together, what Lambert hopes to leave with her audience can be divined. She wishes to show that gender stereotypes are unfair, oppressive, and a person's character should be what defines them as opposed to their gender, race or class. Heathcote joins Kohlberg and Gilligan's ideas about moral educations by suggesting that instead of observing their peers, which is how Kohlberg and Gilligan propose people learn, children as audience members can observe the situations encountered by characters onstage and relate their own experience. This is also similar to the way Brecht and Augusto Boal wish to evoke and inspire the audience, through active observation as opposed to simple entertainment.

Empowerment through the Idea of 'Truth'

Like Brecht, Brazilian writer, playwright, director and theatre activist, Augusto Boal, has revolutionized popular theatre in an attempt to

rally audience members and participants into action.¹⁵ Applying Boal's theories behind his 'Theatre of the Oppressed' practice to Lambert's work, however, is an interesting challenge because Boal never works exclusively or explicitly with children. But I argue his ideas can be applied to Lambert's work because, like Boal's intended audience, children are undeniably an oppressed group. Celebrated Theatre for Young Audiences' writer Dennis Foon describes children as "short people with no rights" (qtd. in Barker 11).

Like Brecht, Boal asserts in his work, both in *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979) and *The Rainbow of Desire* (1994),¹⁶ that in order for a spectator to glean the most they can from a theatrical experience, they must be active observers.¹⁷ Boal achieves this by ensuring that his work poses questions that the audience must engage with, and an audience member at a Boal show would find it very difficult to just sit back and be 'entertained' (Boal 119). Boal believes that all theatre is realistic, as everything actors do can be done in reality. He sees the only difference between the stage and everyday life to be that actors are aware they are using the language of theatre.

'Theatre of the Oppressed' seeks to prove that every person is capable of anything and that any person is capable of "Artistic Creation [as

¹⁵ Headlines Theatre in Vancouver operates on Boal's theories and techniques.

¹⁶ In this book, Boal introduces another one of his famous theories, 'Invisible Theatre'.

¹⁷ This idea stems from Brecht's Alienation effect.

it] is inherent to all human beings” (Boal 118). Boal repeatedly questions the legitimacy of oppression in his work. “Most oppression exists legally,” he notes, and by raising consciousness, Boal seeks to aid in the liberation of oppressed groups, including the oppression of being spectators.¹⁸ Lambert would have concurred with Boal that everyone has the potential for artistic creation. This is evident in her children’s plays as she encourages creativity, an issue important to Boal. Both Boal and Lambert focused on the theme of oppression and how to achieve liberation.

Both Boal and Heathcote’s theories deal with onstage truth. Heathcote states that in order for children to really engage and be influenced by a theatrical production, the quality must be good, and it must be ‘true’.¹⁹ Further, she notes, all those involved in production must believe in the play in order for it to work; an actor who cannot or does not want to get into their character will be identified as a fake by the children. Lambert recognized the intelligence of children when weighing what is being shown to them (Doolittle and Barnieh 41).

Boal agrees with Heathcote that truth onstage is the best way to effectively reach the audience, however, he is unsure of what truth onstage consists of. Boal, whose work is often put together in collective theatre fashion, questions if it is enough if the plot is true or based in truth. Does it

¹⁸ Boal’s later work on ‘Invisible Theatre’ and ‘Forum Theatre’ have a strong focus on actively involving the audience in a performance in order to avoid didacticism and engage their social conscious.

¹⁹ I infer this to be an extension of her concept of realism, that the play must construct its own reality and the action must obey the rules established in that reality.

also have to be an experience that is true to the actor? Is it impossible for theatre to convey truth as it is so contrived by the nature of performance?²⁰ Further Boal questions what makes a production 'good', though he does not propose any answers. "Each artist can have her own style, her own view, and her own definition of theatre," he contends, and if the artist believes in the piece they are presenting, then it is good by their standards which is a big part of what should be achieved (Boal 116).

Boal's own preoccupation with truth in performance stems from his fear of didacticism onstage. He ultimately does not want to tell the audience what is true as he is unsure himself. This traps him in an odd place of trying to convey truth without knowing what it is. I believe that this is how Lambert handled the more difficult subject matter in her plays for young audiences. Though morals are present, solutions are not offered to difficult situations in a didactic fashion. Like Boal, Lambert wants to empower her audience to make their own decisions regarding what they are seeing and how to apply the values of the performance to their lives.

Gilligan also touches on truth in her 1982 book *In a Different Voice* where she explains her ideas behind her theory known as the 'Ethics of Care'. When faced with a problem, the subjects of Gilligan's study began to search for truth to help aid the process of finding a solution. They sought to locate the truth within themselves or through the group they are

²⁰ As theatrical performances are conceived and executed by a creative team, the most "realistic" performance cannot capture reality due to the lack of spontaneity.

responsible for (Gosselin 99). When faced with difficult decisions in the plays, Lambert's characters can be seen looking for answers in a similar fashion.

By addressing various forms of oppression in her plays for children, including sexism, racism and classism, Lambert tries to unravel stereotypes and empower her audience. This is precisely what Brecht and Boal try to accomplish through mounting theatrical productions.

Lambert's Context and Her Goals as a Playwright

According to friend and colleague, Joy Coghill, after Betty Lambert published her 1979 novel *Crossings*, published in the United States under the title, *Bring Down the Sun* (1980), she was labeled an 'anti-feminist' by those active in the budding feminist movement in Vancouver. This is because of the, tame by today's standards, explicit sexual violence and otherwise abusive relationship between the protagonist, Vicki, a young author and her on-again-off-again love interest, Nick. This subject matter was something that no feminist of the time endorsed. Lambert, however, especially later in her life, identified strongly as a feminist.²¹ The beginnings of her feminist ideals can be seen in both *The Riddle Machine* and *Song of the Serpent*. Both *The Riddle Machine* (1966) and *Song of the Serpent* (1967) were written before the second wave of feminism really erupted, but rumblings of issues that became important for second wavers can be found in both scripts.

When I asked Joy Coghill what inspired Lambert to begin writing children's plays, Coghill answered that it was because she asked her to (Coghill Interview). Theatre for young audiences describes plays and

²¹Lambert told Malcolm Page's English class in the fall of 1981, she fully found her feminist anger with *Jennie's Story*.

performances that are specifically produced with the assumption that the majority of the audience will be under the age of eighteen. This genre usually includes plays intended for family audiences. Coghill is credited with bringing theatre for young audiences to Canada and she established Canada's first children's theatre in 1953, the Holiday Theatre with Myra Benson; before this time, children's theatre in Canada was very rare. The Everyman Theatre Company, founded in Vancouver in 1946 by Sydney Risk occasionally produced children's plays during its seven-year existence (Benson and Conolly 68).

A touring company operated out of the Holiday Theatre that took performances to local schools and other areas of the country. The touring aspect of Theatre for Young audiences is still a very important component of this genre²².

Eric Nicol, a contemporary of Lambert's, wrote a play for children, *Beware the Quickly Who*, which was mounted by Coghill and The Holiday Theatre just before Lambert's *The Riddle Machine*. When being interviewed, Coghill mentioned favorable memories of this production. Theatre reviewer Frank Daley from the *Ottawa Journal*, however, held Lambert's play in higher esteem, stating "Many of the things Eric Nicol's

²² A large part of the appeal of touring theatre companies is the low cost. Usually a company will consist of only 4-6 actors and require the bare minimum in terms of set, props, and costumes. Every production has to be mobile as gyms and cafeterias in schools serve as the stage.

play ‘Beware the Quickly Who’ lacked, Betty Lambert’s play ‘The Riddle Machine’ has in abundance.”

In 1969, the Holiday Theatre amalgamated with the, still running, Vancouver Playhouse that opened in 1963 (Benson and Conolly 80). The Playhouse had received great acclaim two years prior when it staged the first production of George Ryga’s *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, which helped the Playhouse establish itself as a pillar of regional²³ professional theatre in Canada (Benson and Conolly 73). The year 1967 was exceptionally busy for Coghill: she held the position of Artistic Director for the companies,²⁴ directed shows that were in house as well as touring, and was pregnant with her first child (Interview). Slowly, the Playhouse engulfed and swallowed the Holiday Theatre, though the tours continued until 1977, years after the in house children’s plays ceased to be performed (Doolittle and Barnieh 71-73).

Coincidentally, since Lambert stopped writing children’s plays, Canada has received an international reputation for producing high quality theatre for young audiences. Green Thumb Theatre, which started producing shows for young audiences in 1975, is in demand nationally and internationally, and The Vancouver International Children’s Festival began

²³ While Toronto had established itself as the centre of English Canadian theatre in the 60s and 70s, each major city centre across the country developed theatre independently (Benson and Conolly 95)

²⁴ Coghill held the position of Artistic Director until 1969. She thinks that the reason she ended up with the position of artistic director was because the men in charge did not realize the importance of theatre and the amount of power garnered by this position (Interview).

in 1978 which “has been instrumental in bringing to Vancouver and other Canadian cities theatre companies and performers from around the world”(Benson and Conolly 108). There has not been significant change in content and style for theatre for young audiences since Lambert was writing for children. “Science fiction, adventure, myths and legends still engage playwrights and young audiences,” however, today there are “far more plays dealing directly with issues pertinent to today’s youth” (Benson and Conolly 108). Lambert’s children’s plays were ahead of their time.

Coghill’s inspiration coupled with just returning from the conference on Theatre for Young Audiences in France was ample impetus for Lambert to tackle writing children’s plays. Lambert was teaching at Simon Fraser University by the time the Women’s Studies department opened in 1976. These inspiring and driven women undoubtedly influenced her. In fact, Lambert’s conduit character in her last play, *Under the Skin*, is based on well known SFU feminist and professor, Maggie Benston. Maggie Benton, as she calls her character in *Under the Skin*, is an assistant professor in English and a single mother like Lambert. Benton is involved in a serious plagiarism case, as Lambert was herself in the early eighties,²⁵ and is trying to manage her life without men (Zimmerman 155).

²⁵ Lambert dedicated a great deal of time and effort to investigating a case of plagiarism against a student.

Lambert's Children's Plays and Feminism

The heroes of *The Riddle Machine* and *Song of the Serpent* are both male, which does not challenge tradition, however, the supporting female counterparts are more than just cheerleaders for the male heroes.

Lambert's only child, Ruth Anne, would have been about two years old when Lambert started writing plays for children. Perhaps Lambert was trying to create strong female role models for young girls like her daughter to relate to and learn from. Cara, in *The Riddle Machine*, and Priscilla, in *Song of the Serpent*, go on journeys that I argue rival the male heroes in terms of pedagogic importance.

Cara is one of five children travelling on a spaceship to the new world in *The Riddle Machine* and one of two girls.²⁶ She is the first of the children to wake up from their suspended animation, which makes her different, not something to be proud of according to Robot. The character notes for everyone except Cara and Hap, the heroine and the hero, are at least a few sentences long; Cara is only described as “different and ashamed for her difference” (Lambert, *The Riddle Machine* iii).

The play opens with Cara dusting the spaceship. “This is one of the useless tasks Robot assigns Cara to keep her out of mischief” (Lambert, *The Riddle Machine* 1). Cara knows how inane this work is but nevertheless is

²⁶ In an earlier draft of the play, Cara was one of three girls. Originally, the other two were Polly and Lolly. They were amalgamated eventually into one character while the show was on its first tour (Coghill Interview).

determined to complete her task to please Robot. Soon it becomes obvious to the audience that Cara is lonely as the only child awake, and that she is distressed that she is good for nothing because she did not wait until she was 'ready' to wake up, as the others seem to be doing. Cara expresses these emotions to Dove, who had snuck on board before leaving earth, however, she quickly brushes these feelings away to go back to her cleaning.

When Hap, the hero and also a 'mistake', first wakes up, Cara tries to coax him back to sleep. She uses verbal persuasion and then plays a lullaby in efforts to save him from her unhappy state, and to save herself from getting in trouble with the authority figure, Robot. It is Cara, however, who makes the mental journey from being ashamed of being a mistake to gaining confidence and following only rules she deems as good for her. She eventually finds the courage to challenge Robot. Hap never conceives of himself as a mistake, thus his journey is not as interesting. By the end of the first act, Cara recognizes that she is growing up and has experienced a whole host of emotions, including deep sadness, which is how this section concludes and what she describes as a part of maturing. In the second act, when trying to figure out the riddle with the other five children, she describes growing up as "it hurts sometimes" (Lambert, *The Riddle Machine* 42).

In the second act, it is Cara who encourages Hap not to lose hope in solving the riddle and to continue to pursue the goal of reaching the New World. She has yet to believe herself capable of doing this on her own, but she has already proven to the audience that she has that potential. This is demonstrated when she stands up to Robot in the first act when he tried to dismantle The Riddle Machine.

Ultimately, all the children work together to foil Robot's diabolical scheme to keep them from the New World, but Cara is the first to declare, "as far as I'm concerned, the greatest riddle of all is me" (Lambert, *The Riddle Machine* 42). This revelation leads all the other children to the same conclusion in the climatic scene that culminates in the realization that a human being is the greatest riddle of all. This answer permits the children access to the greatly anticipated New World.

As can be seen, Cara, though not the official hero in *The Riddle Machine*, plays an integral role in the children reaching their goal of receiving permission to cross into the New World. She also makes a huge emotional journey. At first she does precisely what she is told by Robot, then questions Robot's motives once they become suspect, and spearheads a few mini rebellions against him throughout the play.

Questioning authority is a feminist principle Lambert exhibits through Cara. Lambert focused many of her early short stories, radio plays, and later adult plays on women's minds and their ability to rationally

demand what is in their own best interests, despite what patriarchy dictates. Examples of this are *The Pony* (1956), *The Best Room in the House* (1959), *Falconer's Island* (1966), *Jennie's Story* (1981), and *Under the Skin* (1983). Though *The Riddle Machine* precedes the second wave of feminism, it would not be long after that feminists would be demanding rights to legal abortions and declaring war on the government if their needs were not acknowledged and accepted.

When Priscilla appears on the scene in *Song of the Serpent* she establishes herself as a delicate upper class girl, avoiding mud on the street in a gold rush town to keep her Victorian dress clean and “holding a handkerchief to her nose to ward off infection” (Lambert, *Song of the Serpent* 14). She passively requests not to be stared at and tries to get directions by demonstrating her status. It is Priscilla, however, who accepts a lunch invitation from Billy, the local barber, and not her Uncle James Wright, Billy's neighbour. This is the beginning of the emergence of Priscilla's adventurous side, something that would probably have not been detected by the children in the audience from her first appearance, clinging to her identity as a proper lady, or from the way the villains of the play view her. “My my my, what a pretty little lady,” says the villain Corrigan greeting her (Lambert, *Song of the Serpent* 17).

Much like Cara urging Hap not to lose faith in figuring out the riddle, Priscilla is the one who first suggests that Jason, the hero, go to the gold

mine to clear his Uncle of the murder charge. “Well, if the Baron *is* alive,” she tells him, “your uncle will be set free. It’s all perfectly simple. Go back to the mine and find the Baron. Then the authorities will release your uncle” (Lambert, *Song of the Serpent* 19). *Song of the Serpent* revolves around racial conflict. Jason’s Uncle, Yezih or Old Cariboo, has been convicted of murdering his partner, a white man. Priscilla is probably ignorant or not interested in Jason and his uncle’s First Nation’s heritage and does not share the views of Billy, the town barber whom Lambert uses as a kind of narrator in the play, who has learned to think that the color of Yezih’s skin mattered much more than whether there was enough evidence to convict him of committing murder.

Priscilla displays her adventurous spirit when her own Uncle says he is going to accompany Jason on his journey to the mine. When Wright contemplates what to do with his niece while he is on his perilous mission, Priscilla says, “Oh I’ll come, of course. I’ve always wanted to take part in an adventure. This seems like an exceptional opportunity” (Lambert, *Song of the Serpent* 20). At this point in the play, this seems like a disastrous idea. Someone dressed for the city with no survival skills is only going to slow down the rest of the team.

Much to everyone’s surprise, Priscilla becomes a valuable asset to the mission, if not for everyone’s benefit, then for herself and for the audience. The first change in Priscilla is her footwear. She rests on a rock

complaining of aching feet. At first she chastises Jason for thinking of her feet, telling him, “No gentleman would think of a lady’s feet,” but she quickly mellows as she explains the concept of being a lady (Lambert, *Song of the Serpent* 22). Jason gets her to admit, though not so blatantly, that one’s outer appearance does not change who one is as he suits Priscilla in his moccasins quickly followed by an outfit from his bag, more appropriate to hiking in the woods than her Victorian skirt. At the end of the play, when the team returns to the town in Cariboo Country, B.C., Priscilla remains in her new, more comfortable ensemble, staying with the idea that how you look does not define who you are.

After the clothing exchange between Priscilla and Jason, the two establish a friendship of which the villains, who are trying to exploit Jason to obtain the treasure, are keenly aware. In a later scene, villains Corrigan and Knuckle corner Priscilla and try to bribe her into telling them where the gold mine is, though she does not know, and she refuses to help them find out, placing a higher value on her new found friendship than their bribes.

Even once Jason, Wright and Priscilla are forced to work as slaves in the mine, Priscilla refuses to quietly comply with her new employers. She tries to scare them by wailing like the spirit of the serpent than haunts the mine. This action results in her getting whipped, which comes as no

surprise, but taking action against her aggressors is deemed more important than the consequences against her person.

Like Cara's sadness, Priscilla has her faults as well. She becomes frustrated with Jason and refers to him as a "dirty Indian", which she follows with a swift apology (Lambert, *Song of the Serpent* 26). It seems that she has picked up this phrase from the racist villains, Corrigan and Knuckle. These two characters are American, and it is implied a few times in the script that they are rattled by abolition. Racial slurs are never okay, apology or not, but Lambert employs an interesting tactic that has Priscilla restore her friendship with Jason by turning her rash remark into a joke targeting both of them. "Jason, we're both [dirty]," she says, "even I could use a bath" (Lambert 26).

Priscilla is eventually tricked by Corrigan to reveal the whereabouts of the mine, however, this is not because of feminine weakness. It was a similar situation at the beginning of the play that got Jason to admit that there even *was* a mine. Thus, though these are both essential events to forward the action of the plot, if a moral or lesson is intended from either or both of these events, it is not to succumb to bullies. Cara provides a similar lesson by standing up to Robot in *The Riddle Machine*.

Along the journey, Jason has introduced Priscilla to a few concepts from his culture, including potlatch, where the richest person is the one who can give everything he owns away. It is Priscilla who points out to

Jason in a desperate moment when he gives her a pendant, the last remaining object belonging to his deceased mother, that he has now achieved the sought-after potlatch state.

Though not the heroes of their respective plays, both Cara and Priscilla are essential to the happy endings in *The Riddle Machine* and *Song of the Serpent* and both, as outlined above, have many lessons to learn on their own and to share with the audience. Both are encouraging and inspiring to their male counterparts while remaining true to themselves.

Relationships and Power

According to many scholars, particularly male scholars on theatre, a play cannot exist without conflict,²⁷ and in Lambert's plays for young audiences most of the conflict happens between people in authority and those who are subordinate. This is always a pertinent issue for youth as most of their interactions will take place with people who have the ability to wield power over them, whether that is a parent, a teacher, etc.

As demonstrated above with Cara and Priscilla, Lambert proposes that it is important to question those in authority. Lambert wanted to share the idea that youth have the power to interrogate the motives of those in control, such as Cara does with Robot, and Priscilla does with

²⁷ Feminist dramatists, such as Margaret Hollingsworth have argued that conflict as essential to drama is a male construct.

Knuckle and Corrigan and, to some degree, with her uncle, Wright. Lambert also wanted to demonstrate that youth have the power to define themselves. It takes Cara the whole play no longer to see herself as a mistake because Robot has been telling her that she was for so long. Priscilla learns to understand that she is a lady no matter what she is wearing and who questions it. For Carol Gilligan, this lesson entails being conscious of your relationships with others and being able to clearly distinguish where the opinions of your peers end and are not meaningful to you and your life.

The corollary to this moral, which is more implied than stated (as is the dynamics of power) is judgment. Lambert does not advocate judging others based on appearance, clothing or when you woke up. She advocates seeing value in everyone.

Lambert's Objectives

When I asked Joy Coghill about Lambert's objectives and, implicitly, her own when producing works for young audiences, she said to "entertain [and] stimulate the imagination" (Interview). Dramatizing exciting adventures in outer space and in the days of gold rush, Lambert's plays easily obtained these goals. In the following chapters, I will examine the lessons in these plots that Lambert and Coghill found valuable to share with young audiences.

Coghill and I also discussed the formula Robot feeds to the children in *The Riddle Machine*; one tastes great to Robot and terrible to the children, and the other the opposite. Advocating for a healthy diet, the imbalance in the ingestion of these formulae cause the children either lacklustre excitement to please Robot, or bouts of hyperactivity. Before leaving earth, Robot had been given instructions to give the children a combination of both formulae, but deemed the one the children enjoy as unnecessary. The children get their hands on the formula nonetheless while under the influence of the renegade, Hap. But, upon seeing his peers' reaction to consuming exclusively the pleasant formula, Hap dumps out the balance of this formula, as he knows that they will never be able to solve the riddle and get to the New World under its influence. Thus begins a major theme in Lambert's plays: How can children be children and still have a sense of responsibility? Coghill described this as the idea that "moderation is essential", something she learned while studying theatre for young audiences with Brian Way. "Enough is enough, more is too much" (Interview).

Coghill states that Lambert stopped writing plays for young audiences because she stopped asking her to, however, it might also be worth considering that Lambert did not like the criticism of her shows as can be seen in her bio from a production of *Sqrioux-De-Dieu*,

Having written many unsuccessful serious dramas and children's epics, Betty has decided to come out of the closet and write heterosexual smut. Fortunately, she has tenure at SFU (*Sqrieux-De-Dieu* Program).

The Riddle Machine

I had been asked to write a children's stage play--my first--by Miss Joy Coghill, a remarkable woman who is responsible for so much innovative work in Canadian children's theater. I began with some vague idea of monster children and the general theme of growing up--and was working out conventional plots, with castles, fairy godmothers, witches, and so on. Miss Coghill said, "Make it new!" and so, in the end, I came up with a play which, Miss Coghill says, broke almost every rule of children's theater at that time. (Lambert qtd. bettylambert.com)

The Riddle Machine is Betty Lambert's most celebrated stage play written for young audiences. It was also the best-received work by Lambert for young audiences when it was initially performed.

Joy Coghill approached Lambert to write a play for young audiences and taught Lambert some of the techniques important to consider when writing for children,

Charades, songs, exercises, games, horseplay, and elements of routine are all blended successfully here so that there is no long period of stage inactivity. Little children especially need a kinetic approach to a play and both Mrs. Lambert and her director know what they are about (Daley).

Coghill learned these techniques from Brian Way, an expert in the field who produced for young audiences in England. Coghill was introduced to Way's theatre for young audiences while she was studying with Charlotte

Chorpenning at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago (Doolittle and Barnieh 70).

The Riddle Machine is directed at a large age group of 5-12 year olds. In Jean Piaget's 'periods of learning' this means that the bulk of the audience would be capable of concrete operational thought (7-11 years old). The youngest members of the audience would be in the later stages of the pre-operational activity period (2-7 years old). This play has valuable teaching to appeal to both periods.

Simply, the plot of *The Riddle Machine* is that five children are on board a spaceship travelling to the New World. Travelling 500 years, they are in the care of a Robot that is supposed to help prepare them to answer a riddle before they reach their destination. The Riddle Machine that will ask the quintessential riddle is on board. If they fail to answer the riddle correctly, they will not be allowed to enter the New World. The journey is a metaphor for childhood and maturation, and the answer to the riddle, "What is the Greatest Riddle of all?" is "a human being" (Lambert, *The Riddle Machine* 42). The children go through a series of trials and adventures before they are ready to answer the riddle.

Methods of Realism

Both Brecht and Heathcote would label *The Riddle Machine* as realism. No children would have experience with space travel, but the play

is set up to draw the audience into its recognizable world while remaining fantastical. When performed at Vancouver's Holiday Theatre, reported Frank Daley in *The Ottawa Journal*, "The set (the interior of a space ship) was exciting for the youngsters, utilizing dozens of flashing lights, levers and levels to make things interesting and realistic." He proposed the play be mounted locally.

Lambert sets up the characters of the children in *The Riddle Machine* like Brecht set up many of his characters. They are types more than individuals. This is particularly true of the three children who are not 'mistakes', for example Ug, who "isn't very bright and power makes him dangerous....Ug lived on our street" (Lambert, *The Riddle Machine* ii). By setting up these characters as archetypal, Lambert has intended to show the children in the audience, who will presumably identify with either Cara or Hap, that the other children are people they could go to school with, Ug a bully, or Polly a "tattle tale" ["She allied herself with authority and suffered dreadfully for it" (Lambert, *The Riddle Machine* ii)]. This makes the play more relevant for the audience; they can watch themselves onstage dealing with people and situations they are familiar with.

Song serves a double purpose in *The Riddle Machine*. First, it is used as one of the "exercise points" that Coghill pointed out in our interview. The second is that songs are employed in Brechtian style.

We are told the songs have specific purposes within the world of the play. There is one used as a lullaby, one for exercise time, etc. In the second act, however, when the children have taken the formula that tastes so great to them and causes them to become hyperactive and demanding, they start pressing all the buttons on the music machine. That results, according to the play's stage directions, in "A DISCORDANT MEDLEY OF MIXED-UP NURSERY RHYME TUNES" symbolic of the state the children have reached (Lambert, *The Riddle Machine*, 24). Brecht used song to present the emotional and physical state of the characters onstage. The children are out of control and, in this state, it seems will never reach the New World. Here the music is emphasizing this point.

Moral Education and Gender

Not only does *The Riddle Machine's* lessons demonstrate Lambert's values to the audience, but she also hints to the actors and to the production team of her feminist ideals through notes on characters and stage directions. Robot has a lengthy description in the notes for the play, far longer than those for any of the children. Lambert was making certain that once she, the playwright, was no longer present, she still had control over what *kind* of robot Robot would be. Robot is an 'answer Robot', and though the crux of *The Riddle Machine* is hinged around providing a specific answer, Lambert wants to push the importance of questioning the

world we live in. The audience can see this by contrasting Cara and Robot. Robot is the closest thing to a villain in *The Riddle Machine* and is unable to conceive questions; “none of [its] circuits leads to the making of a question. Only to the making of answers” (Lambert, *The Riddle Machine* i). Cara, conversely, once gaining some confidence and taking note of Robot’s conflicting instructions and behaviour, questions Robot and attempts to understand Robot’s actions. Lambert also highlights her belief that people should confront confusion and ask questions through Cara’s action.

The character of Robot in *The Riddle Machine* has an atypical gender presentation. When I first read the play, I had assumed Robot was male, probably due to the way he wielded power over the children, but it was Joy Coghill and Jane Heyman who pointed out to me the intrinsic maternal qualities, associated with women, that Robot possesses. These conflicting ideologies have led to men and women playing this role. When a woman first played the part of Robot, the play was seen to be an attack on motherhood. Lambert refuted this claim. I believe that Robot’s ambiguous gender presentation reveals an interesting hint to Lambert’s feminism. Unlike many feminists from her generation, Lambert does not automatically label a man as ‘the enemy’. Furthermore, she is challenging the theatrical norm of typically having a male villain; she gives women the capacity to be evil and powerful simultaneously.

In the second act of the play, Robot labels Hap, who has been unreceptive to instructions, as “an emergency” and states, “in an emergency I am empowered to Make a Decision” (Lambert, *The Riddle Machine* 11). The children make decisions throughout the entire script, especially Hap and Cara, without needing or asking for permission though all of their decisions are not necessarily positive ones. At one point, finally acting in rebellion against their authority figure Robot, the children decide to place him in a closet to get him out of their way, and Hap resorts to name calling, saying “I’ve got a few ideas for you too, Ugly” (Lambert, *The Riddle Machine* 13). Here and at another point in the play, the audience might side with Robot:

You’ve all done exactly what you pleased. You’ve all been naughty, bad, Disobedient and cheeky...loosened my screw and hurt my feelings and now *I’m* supposed to answer your silly old riddle. Now *I’m* supposed to take care of everything (Lambert, *The Riddle Machine* 29).

Although Robot has been the villain, these moments are brief plugs by Lambert that everyone should be treated fairly; it is undeniable that the children have treated Robot with much cruelty at times. But Lambert does not answer the question, ‘Does Robot deserve such harsh treatment?’ Instead she moves into another prominent theme in *The Riddle Machine*: accepting and facing responsibility. The children do not answer to abusing Robot, but turn their attention towards their ultimate objective of solving the riddle and reaching the New World. As Hap states, “Robot can’t

answer the riddle. It's *our* riddle, and we've for to do it ourselves” (Lambert, *The Riddle Machine* 29). This is a distinct change from what is previously seen in Hap's character. Earlier his main principle was never to be good. Now by showing this sense of responsibility, he demonstrates he is ready to enter the new world, a metaphor used by Lambert for growing up. The other children then exhibit the same readiness that Hap has attained by offering him support in solving the riddle when he is losing faith in his ability to achieve their goal (Lambert, *The Riddle Machine* 35). This results in Hap regaining his confidence, and finding his way on the path to adulthood, but he admits he needs support from his peers, “But, What can I do? I'm only one person” (Lambert, *The Riddle Machine* 35). This is not an easy task, but cooperation usually results in positive outcomes, as Lambert shows by the happy ending of the play.

Though the children reach the new world and this is a happy ending, she does not indicate that everything will be happily ever after. Hints to challenges in the future are brought up by Casper, another one of the children: “[M]ay be we're just going to have to get used to it. Trouble, I mean” (Lambert, *The Riddle Machine* 44). In a genre that is riddled with fairy tale inspiration and adaptation, Lambert provides a refreshing take on life and gives it in a pleasing manner. Its difficult to explain that life is not easy without sounding brutally pessimistic, but the idea of trouble looming makes it seem inevitable yet manageable. Hopefully, the children

will be able to handle future trouble in modes similar to those they used to solve this problem, co-operation and critical thinking, for example.

Furthermore, hopefully, Robot has successfully portrayed to the audience that leaving norms unquestioned and being too quick to categorize others does not lead to fulfilment.

Another quality Robot possesses that Lambert is trying to condemn is an inability to understand purpose. Robot spews out rules we have all heard without explaining them. To Cara early in the play Robot says, “You mustn’t speak until you’re Spoken to,” and at this point Cara does not have the courage or want to question this authority figure (Lambert, *The Riddle Machine* 7). “Better than a mother because *I* never make a mistake,” Robot tells Cara. “You see what a good diet and strict upbringing can accomplish?” (Lambert, *The Riddle Machine* 8). Though never explicitly stated in the play by Lambert, the only logic behind some of Robot’s rules for the children, especially for Cara, is that keeping them subdued is in his own interests. When Cara finally questions Robot’s actions, disobeying a ‘Do Not Touch’ sign and attempting to dismantle The Riddle Machine, Robot answers with “Good little girls should be seen and not heard” (Lambert, *The Riddle Machine* 20). Robot is attempting to play on Cara’s insecurity about being good as opposed to explaining his own insecurity surrounding The Riddle Machine. Cara throws the concept of being good back at Robot, “But you’re being disobedient” (Lambert, *The Riddle*

Machine 20). Cara is starting to become aware of the unfair rules her life has been governed by and the hypocritical creature that has been enforcing them. In the character notes for Robot, Lambert states:

Some people are a bit like Robot: they forget the purpose of the routine, until the routine is the only end. A little like a mother who, intent on making a proper home for her family, becomes more concerned with the home than with the people who make it one (Lambert, *The Riddle Machine* ii).

Though it is unlikely that the audience will see these notes, Lambert contrasts this characteristic of Robot with the hero, Hap. Hap's routine is to rebel or to cause trouble according to Robot. Hap, however, does not in the end disobey Robot simply for the sake of being disobedient, though this might be how this behaviour begins. Hap does not like how Robot treats him or the other children and thus attempts to instigate change. When he feels defeated, Hap does not taunt Robot in a bout of formula-induced hyperactivity like the other children; in fact, he instead dumps out the formula, which would appear to be siding with Robot rather than with his friends. This action, however, still aids in reaching the ultimate goal of answering the riddle to gain access to the New World. Through Hap, Lambert is teaching action as a means to an end, as opposed to action for the sake of acting. Activism and feminism are virtually inseparable.

This idea of seeing the purpose behind action is present very early on in the script. The play opens with Cara dusting the spaceship, "trying very hard to believe in what she is doing" (Lambert, *The Riddle Machine* 1).

We soon learn, however, that there is no dust in space as she notes, “I will be glad when there is really some dust or something to really clean up”(Lambert, *The Riddle Machine* 1). Robot is keeping her busy in attempts to keep Cara from causing any trouble; she does not yet have a purpose.

Cara and Hap are the two children that wake up early in the play, a cardinal sin according to Robot. These two characters give the audience the option to accept what they have been told about themselves, or to challenge it. Robot refers to both children as mistakes, “It’s a shame. Well, mistakes *will* happen. There’ll be plenty for you to do— yes even you— on the new world” (Lambert, *The Riddle Machine* 6). Not only is Lambert trying to get the audience to question the labels and roles assigned to them, but also to question the ones they choose to take on. Cara concedes to Robot’s point, “But I’m a Mistake!” while Hap goes against what he is told and defines his own identity, “Well I’m not!” (Lambert, *The Riddle Machine* 4). The practice of defining one’s own identity is inherently feminist.²⁸

Cara’s journey throughout the play is struggling with being good. She initially defines being good as obeying Robot who oppresses her by ordering her around and referring to her as a mistake. Ultimately, she permits what she, herself, believes to define what is right and wrong. As

²⁸ Women and other oppressed groups have been challenging the roles assigned to them by patriarchal societies for centuries.

outlined by Gilligan in her 'Ethics of Care', being able to balance decision making between your own interests and those of the communities you are a part of results in relieving a sense of oppression. Cara struggles with this because she must determine her community alliances and her own interests.

Empowerment through the Idea of 'Truth'

The jury is still out, and probably could not come to a consensus, on what ultimately makes a play 'good'. Heathcote says that a play must make sense within its defined context, whereas Boal is very unsure of what gives a play quality but knows that it must be true. He contends "truth [is] utterly distinct from realism" (Boal xxv).

One theatrical "truth" in the Western context is the influence of Classical Greek drama. In *Jennie's Story* (1981), Lambert went on to try to challenge the rules of drama and the role that women play therein as outlined by Greek tragedy and the writings of Aristotle on theatre. According to Aristotle in his *Poetics*, tragedy is the imitation of action that is serious. It should evoke pity and fear from the audience, known as catharsis. This will only be achieved if the tragedy consists of six elements. Listed from greatest to least importance, again according to Aristotle, these elements are plot, character, thought, diction, song and spectacle.

The protagonist of a tragedy should be famous, but not so virtuous the audience cannot identify, and not so evil that the audience desires something tragic to befall them (Aristotle 36). Conventionally, the protagonist is male. Also, Aristotle outlined the necessary parts of a tragedy. These are the prologue, episode, exodus, and choric song. The choric song consists of two parts, the parodos and stasimon (Aristotle 41). Though we rarely refer to these parts using these terms, most plays still follow this outline, the parts, however, are more commonly known as stasis, crisis, climax, and the resolution/denouement (Ball 12). Lambert challenged Aristotle by trying to create her own version of the tragic form, but *The Riddle Machine* still demonstrates these traditions. The riddle that *The Riddle Machine* asks the children that they must answer before being allowed to cross into the New World appears to be a variation of the riddle of the Sphinx that was posed to Oedipus when he was travelling (back) to Thebes:

When all of space has yielded to travel
And is simple as A, B, and C,
What will still be left to unravel,
The puzzle, the mystery, the final key?
What is the greatest riddle of all? (Lambert, *The Riddle Machine* 10)

The answer to both riddles is 'a human being', this is what Oedipus concluded before fulfilling his destiny, and what the children have to divine before fulfilling their own. Interestingly, the first chance the children have to answer the riddle, Robot pressures Ug to come up with the answer since

“you’re to be king,” the role Oedipus went on to fulfil after facing the Sphinx (Lambert, *The Riddle Machine* 24). Ug, however, is not able to solve the riddle. This is perhaps Lambert’s first stab at challenging the Ancient Greek conventions following the modernist and early feminist theatre trend.

Lambert also seeks to prove to her audience through *The Riddle Machine* that what is right for one person might not be right for everyone. This is one way the formula (food) is used. There are two formulas on board the spaceship, Blastium Fixate and Halycyon Pixate. Robot has elected only to feed the children one, the one he prefers and believes to taste better. The children prefer the other one, but it makes them extremely hyper as demonstrated in the scene directly before Hap discards the contents. What can be divined from this is the beginning of the moral Coghill highlighted a few times while being interviewed; “moderation is essential,” she notes, and “enough is enough, more is too much” (Interview). In this case, it is a balance of a formula that is probably good for you versus one that tastes good. In the world the audience lives in, this can be translated into achieving a balance between work and play. Based on reviews of *The Riddle Machine* when it was first produced, the high regard it is still held in by Lambert fans, and all the intricacies of the script, without a doubt Coghill and Lambert achieved their goal of

“entertain[ing],” and “stimulat[ing] the imagination” of the children in their audiences (Coghill Interview).

Lambert had better experiences writing for her friend and colleague than with other commissions when writing pieces for children,

I’m saying that when the CBC told me that all they wanted out of me was a plot and “likeable” characters for *The Magic Lie* [29], they were insulting children, they were insulting me and they were ripping off the taxpayer, not to mention W. O. Mitchell ... Is it all right to put on crud when it’s crud for children ... Forgive me for writing that script. I wrote it, I finished it. I tried to stay true to the author’s intention. But all the time I was certain of one thing ... children recognize the banal. Children recognize the cheap. (Lambert qtd. in Doolittle and Barnieh 41)

Lambert probably learned most of what she knew about writing for children from her exceptionally different experiences in terms of reception with *The Riddle Machine* and *Song of the Serpent*, discussed in the next chapter.

²⁹ *The Magic Lie* was a CBC television program. Lambert wrote an episode called ‘The Infinite Worlds of May Be’ that was aired in February 1977.

Song of the Serpent

The Holiday Theatre first presented *Song of the Serpent* in 1967. It was directed by Jane Heyman and described as a “touring company melodrama” featuring “just a touch of miscegenation, rape, illegitimacy, racist conflict, and drunkenness” (Lambert, *Song of the Serpent Cover*). *Song of the Serpent* was commissioned for the centennial anniversary of Canada and thus reeks of nationalism. The setting is undeniably Canadian and most of the characters vaguely express at one point how proud and happy they are to live in Canada.

Song of the Serpent is set in the early days of the Cariboo gold rush near Soda Creek, British Columbia. The Cariboo gold rush took place in the 1860s and was not as famous as the Klondike gold rush of the 1890s but played an important role in the early stages of the development of the economy in B.C. (Grace 2). As evident in her adult plays, Lambert bases most of her work in historical fact, and *Song of the Serpent* can be placed in a long English Canadian theatrical tradition of constructing Canada as ‘North’. In this case, ‘the true North strong and free’ seeks to distinguish itself from the South, the United States, by dealing with issues pertaining to Canadians, including aspects that define the Canadian identity and how

Canadians handle racism. *Song of the Serpent* is set one year after the Civil Rights Movement in the United States.³⁰

Like *The Riddle Machine*, setting *Song of the Serpent* in the North during the gold rush, also makes the play fantastical as the North “creates spaces for people to dream about, to escape to”; this space is constructed by Lambert as “romantic, mysterious, dangerous and wild” (Grace 1). Furthermore, typically this space is primarily occupied and enjoyed by men, but, as I have demonstrated in Chapter 3, girls, as shown through the character of Priscilla, can take part in the adventure as well.

Lambert uses the melodramatic form to structure the plot in *Song of the Serpent*. This, coupled with the setting of the play one hundred years prior to when it was produced, simplifies and harmonizes pertinent contemporary sensitive issues with entertainment. “[M]elodramas present us with heroes and heroines, villains and side-kicks....desire to escape into that simple, predictable world...events will end ‘happily ever after’” (Lambert 177). This is a contrast to the ending of *The Riddle Machine* that, as discussed in the previous chapter, ends happily with no guarantee of that happiness lasting ever after.

History is used to teach morality in a way that is not didactic in *Song of the Serpent*. Lambert condemns greed and violence periodically throughout the play, demonstrating various negative consequences that

³⁰ The two American characters, Corrigan and Knuckle, still carry guns, despite this being illegal in Canada.

result from these traits. Because it can be excused as happening ‘back then’, the audience can more easily stomach the racist attitudes of the characters. Lambert nevertheless hopes that it may hold a mirror up to the audience to re-evaluate their own behaviour. Though placed in a precise historical moment, the melodramatic mode of the play lends it to be a timeless piece of good versus evil that will always be relevant (Grace 4).

Even since this play was written there has been further shift in what is considered acceptable and what is not in terms of racist attitudes. I cringed when I first picked up the play, struck by the description in the character notes that “children may be incorporated into the play as...Chinese laundryman” (Lambert, *Song of the Serpent* i). Nonetheless, I chose to focus on this play for the message Lambert intended to share despite its now inappropriate language, which is a strong protest against racial discrimination.

In the tradition of theatre for young audiences, after its debut performances *Song of the Serpent* toured schools in B.C. The only crucial theatrical means needed by the play is a sound effect to signify the ominous serpent protecting the mine. Little is required in terms of sets and lighting.

Methods of Realism

The character of Billy DeLuxe, described by Lambert as a “negro fop,” is similar to Brecht’s narrator in *Threepenny Opera* (Lambert, *Song*

of the Serpent Cover). Billy sings all the songs in the play, which were designed to vary the pace to hold the audience's attention, but failed to achieve this result at the initial production according to a review written by Jack Richards.

Billy's songs also serve to introduce the characters and to explain the back-story of why Yezih has been convicted of murder. This saves a lot of dialogue and time that would have been spent on scenes with 'low action', presumably less interesting to a younger audience. Billy's songs also make poignant commentary on society and on the immediate members of the community who live in the world Lambert has constructed in *Song of the Serpent*:

Never did nothin' for nobody, nobody did nothin' for me.
... It's a rotten world and I don't care!
... I'm free! ... (Lambert 21,22)

And,

An Indian killed a White man.
At least that's what they say.
An Indian killed a white man.
That's evidence any day ...
They're going to hang old Cariboo,
They're going to hang him high.
An Indian killed a White man, son,
And so he's got to die (Lambert 6).

Billy is the one who points out that justice, which should be what is at stake— as Kohlberg would argue— is not what will be the deciding factor for Yezih (Lambert 7). Like the characters in *The Riddle Machine*, Billy

plays the role of symbol as opposed to an individual character, sharing his and, presumably, Lambert's philosophy of life (Fatkin 62). He acts like a Greek chorus pointing out inequities Lambert wants to make sure the audience does not miss.³¹

Wright, the employee of the Hudson's Bay company, claims that the law is fair, despite the fact that a judge and jury of exclusively white men have tried Yezih, whom Wright refers to almost exclusively as "Old Cariboo", his nickname within the community (Lambert, *Song of the Serpent* 7). This references an attitude still prevalent today when people from privileged status make claims that equality now exists though they have no experience dealing with certain kinds of oppression. Wright's role makes evident many different stereotypes against First Nations' people as the audience can see through him in his first interactions with Jason. Wright questions why Jason, as an Indian, has such a 'normal' name, and questions his ability to speak English (Lambert, *Song of the Serpent* 7). He also discriminates against Jason because of his race and young age in insinuating Jason does not have the means to buy anything in his store (Lambert, *Song of the Serpent* 8). These insinuations thus present another prejudice typical of white people of which Jason is incredibly paranoid. When Jason loses his temper because of the way he has been treated in the store, he inadvertently discloses the existence of the gold mine in order to

³¹ Lambert also uses individual characters like a Greek chorus in her later adult work, such as *Gamma* in *Sqrioux-De-Dieu*.

impress Wright with his worth by showing Wright some of the gold his Uncle Yezih has shared with him. Wright takes the gold after showing it to Billy and Hurdy, compounding Jason's belief that all white men are greedy (Lambert, *Song of the Serpent* 8). Lambert clearly intended to exhibit to the audience all the stereotypes she will address during the play through words and interaction early in the play before later disrupting them.

Wright is also unaware as to why his wife, a woman of First Nations' decent, has left him. Hopefully, to the audience this is obvious and her motives perfectly reasonable. When Wright's brother, whom Wright views as successful and feels he must go to whatever means to impress him, including lying, arrived from Vancouver Island to visit him, Wright sent his wife away because he was embarrassed to be married to someone from another race, fearing torment and judgment similar to what he receives from Corrigan and Knuckle later in the play when they refer to him as a "squaw man" (Lambert, *Song of the Serpent* 35). The audience, however, is encouraged to side with Wright's wife on this issue and to see that she could not return to Wright, as choosing to be a part of a relationship with someone who is embarrassed by you because of the colour of your skin is not a good environment, and though it may hurt to leave, being true to who you are is of much greater importance. This idea is similar to one of the morals demonstrated in *The Riddle Machine*: Determine what is right for you and do not necessarily believe what others dictate as law.

Following the interaction in the store, a Hudson's Bay Trading Post operated by Wright, Yezih is marched through town on his way to prison before he is to be hanged. Jason tells Yezih that he lost his temper and revealed to the townspeople that the Serpent mine is not just a legend. To save Jason from harm because of his knowledge, Yezih throws Jason's gold into the street so that, while everyone scrambles for it, Jason may escape undetected. This is a dirty trick according to Corker and Knuckle, who need Jason to execute their plan of finding the gold mine to make their fortune, and in their frustration they present another stereotypical view dominant culture holds of First Nations people: "[You] can't trust an Injun" (Lambert, *Song of the Serpent* 13).

In this exchange and chaotic dive for gold, it is interesting to note that Billy, Hurdy and Wright do not join the townspeople diving into the street for the gold. Wright attributes his restraint to the fact that he is an English gentleman, while Hurdy attempts to return the gold she ended up with during the scramble to its rightful owner, Yezih— a little moral against stealing thrown in by Lambert. Billy's explanation for his own behaviour reinforces the idea that greed is not a desirable trait, one of the major themes Lambert revisits frequently in *Song of the Serpent*, "No, sir, me, I like to keep my hands *clean*" (Lambert 13). Billy is referring to the muddy streets, however, having one's hands clean is also a well known expression for being honest and fair, desirable qualities which greed does not foster.

Towards the beginning of the play, Billy states clearly that he has no intention to get involved with anyone else's business. He has a firm mentality of 'us versus them', though he is the only 'us'. He repeats in his songs the phrase, "Folk like me, and folk like you" periodically throughout the play. On page 22, at one such moment, Hurdy interjects a line into one of Billy's songs, "It's an awful lonely way to be". But Billy sings back, "That's the way it's got ta be!" hinting that if he stays isolated he will not be vulnerable to the attitudes and actions of others (Lambert, *Song of the Serpent*).

Jason also begins the play with a similar notion that everyone is the enemy, though he expresses this with more hostility than Billy. As a product of a mixed race relationship, Jason has undoubtedly experienced racial prejudice from all sides. He even accuses Billy of being white, or at least assimilated into white culture:

Jason: You're all the same, you white men!

Billy: White men? White men? Take a good look, boy.

Jason: You're not Indian.

Billy: No, I'm not Indian.

Jason: Then you're just the same, a white man, a liar, and a cheat

Because Jason reads Billy as white, he assumes that he is greedy and intends to steal the gold from him and Yezih, like other white men he has encountered (Lambert, *Song of the Serpent* 9). Jason's hostility results in him carelessly revealing to the American villains, Corker and Knuckle, that

he knows the location of his Uncle's gold mine, the journey there then comprising most of the action in the play.

While addressing some First Nations' customs, specifically the potlatch, in the following excerpt Lambert tackles the normalized concept of greed within dominant society:

Jason:...when we give away, we become more than ourselves...It is very difficult to give everything. You must be very great.

Pricilla: Give everything away? How odd. With us, it's quite the other way round. With us, the richest man is the one who keeps everything for himself (Lambert, *Song of the Serpent* 23).

Lambert takes another stab at condemning greed through Jason's admirable motivation in trekking to the mine. Jason's interest in the journey is to clear his Uncle's name rather than find his fortune. Billy's journey to the mine is similarly altruistic; under Hurdy's persuasion, he follows the group to the mine and ends up saving the day, despite his original resolution to stay out of everyone else's business.

Moral Education and Gender

Lambert's North holds a great deal of diversity, reminiscent of most cosmopolitan cities of Canada today. Hurdy is Dutch, Wright of British decent, Jason has a First Nations mother and a white father, Billy is an American ex-slave, and Corrigan, referred to as Corker, and Knuckle are Americans with a thirst and fever for gold. The conflicts between different

genders and races are exhibited onstage for the children to see, relate to and, hopefully, to learn from. Lambert embroils their conflicts with moral decisions. Not one of these characters can be judged fairly based on their gender, the colour of their skin or where they come from, much like individuals the audience would encounter everyday. Each character has distinct motivations; it is by these that Lambert wishes the audience to judge.

The hero, Jason, who knows where to locate the gold mine that will clear his Uncle's murder charge, leads Corker and Knuckle to what they think will be their ultimate fortune. If Lambert cannot change all the oppressive and racist attitudes present in Canada in her short children's play, she advocates for everybody to act with their own interests in mind, as demonstrated by the various motives behind each character's venture to the Serpent mine. Further, once the plot explodes, literally as the mine ultimately blows up, it is every man and woman for themselves (Lambert, *Song of the Serpent* 38)! This is a more pessimistic view of society than 'everyone working together towards a common goal' that *The Riddle Machine* presents, however, as Gilligan argues in *In a Different Voice*, you have to act with the interests of yourself and your group in mind; sometimes altruistic decisions are not practical. Following the convention of 'behind every great man is a great woman' that Lambert seems to be fond of, Hurdy, a "Hurdy Gurdy Girl" who dances in the "Wake Up Jake"

Saloon in the gold rush town, convinces Billy, though he makes it very clear that he wants nothing to do with anyone else's affairs, to follow the path the others have taken to the mine. Billy thus eventually saves Priscilla, Jason and Wright from slavery in the gold mine. The story would not have such a happy ending if it were not for Hurdy's perseverance in persuading Billy.

Though melodramas are typically filled with stereotype characters and situations, the prejudice that Lambert's play's stereotypical characters exhibit is intended to share with the audience the need to improve our world in this capacity. Ultimately, the play ends happily, including with the idea that the world works better once we can see past our fundamental differences, as Billy demonstrates in changing the ending of his song to "Folk like me and you" (Lambert, *Song of the Serpent* 48).

The play ends very quickly in typical melodramatic fashion, slowly building suspense, quick climax, and a brief denouement— here the explosion of the mine and return to the town to clear Yezih's name. But Lambert also leaves the play open to the actor's choice. In the last stage direction, Lambert indicates,

BILLY can either go or not [with the other characters], as seems possible to the actor. I have seen two productions—BILLY chose in one to go, and in one to remain. If he goes, then he must put his arm around HURDY. My first version called for him not to go, but I am persuaded by the actor who played BILLY that if it's all right for *him*, then who am I to be pessimistic (Lambert, *Song of the Serpent* 49).

These directions give the option for the play to end not quite ‘happily ever after’, much like *The Riddle Machine*. If Billy goes with the others and puts his arm around Hurdy, then he is entirely rejecting his former attitude of ‘us versus them’ and now he is one of ‘them’. If the actor stays, however, despite the fact that everything turns out well for Priscilla, Jason, Wright, Yezih, and the Baron, Yezih’s mining partner, we will understand that outcasts still remain. This second ending is truer to the world in which we live.

Empowerment through the Idea of ‘Truth’

Though *Song of the Serpent* does not allude to any specific First Nations’ legends, like *The Riddle Machine* it is evocative of Ancient Greek myth (Grace 4). The quest for gold and a protagonist named Jason make ‘Jason and the Golden Fleece’ instantaneously spring to mind.

Originally frustrated by the apparent hopelessness of the situation, Jason is motivated by his Uncle’s innocence to go to the Serpent mine and find the Baron. Though those in power within *Song of the Serpent* dictate that Yezih is guilty, Jason’s actions are inspired by what he believes is true. Lambert hopes that this example will teach young audience members to take action on what they believe to be true. This encourages individuals to choose their own truths and not just to let dominant opinion decide.

Conclusion

Lambert's children's plays tackle a myriad of topics pertinent to not only children but also to humanity in general. As seen in the previous chapters, Lambert advocates for personal choice in a variety of ways, and offers skills to deal with conflicts with peers and those in authority. She addresses major themes such as the importance of solidarity and cooperation in *The Riddle Machine* and racism in *Song of the Serpent*.

Though rejected by the feminist movement of her time, with today's third-wave of feminism advocating choice, acceptance and tolerance, I am without a doubt comfortable accepting Lambert as a feminist. She provides countless opportunities in the subject matter of her plays for her audience to grow and develop, however, always leaves it up to them to choose what lessons they want to take with them as she never approaches her subjects didactically.

In today's feminist movement, the importance of education to tackle struggles we face everyday, such as racism, is frequently emphasized. Feminism, however, is such a controversial term encompassing so many different view points, that many people are unsure if they want to align themselves with this term and movement.

Lambert, however, in her works for young audiences makes feminism seem very appealing. Her subtle approach to dealing with all sorts of issues is still relevant today, making it difficult to deny the good her plays propose feminism has to share with the world. A person who identifies as an anti-feminist could still enjoy a Lambert play for children, as easily as someone who has chosen to embrace the term, and both could take away things to ponder about incidents in their everyday lives.

Not only does Lambert still have appeal to audiences, but also *The Riddle Machine* and *Song of the Serpent* lend themselves well to current companies that tour children's plays. Mounting one of Lambert's plays for children would not be a large feat for a children's theatre company.

Neither of the plays discussed here require a lot of superfluous set pieces, properties or special effects that would make it difficult to transport from school to school. Plus, the appeal of bringing a play into a school is that it usually only takes an hour or two away from the regular schedule and is framed as a special event for the children. Though many, including Brian Way, argue that having children actively participate in plays is a much better way to foster learning through the arts, money is a key factor for school and arts education often has to share a budget or time in a schedule with gym class or music lessons. Bringing plays into schools is a great opportunity to introduce professional theatre to younger audiences and some teachers will take this one step further and revolve lessons around

the content of the play. *Song of the Serpent* could be used in the context of a history class, for example, enforcing ideas from the script lingering with the audience long after the performance has ended.

It is commonly thought that feminist messages delivered through the arts and media must be direct to not be confused and misinterpreted, however, a didactic approach can often cause resistance from the intended audience. If it results in no one listening to what you are trying to express, or if the only people willing to listen are like-minded, is the message worth repeating? Probably yes, for the creator, however, the educational goal might be lost.

Perhaps a good lesson to learn from Lambert's plays for children is not located in the text but rather in her approach to writing. The best way to reach the biggest possible audience, especially when dealing with youth whom one must access through parents and the education system, is perhaps to present ideas in a seemingly 'safe' fashion. The feminist messages in Lambert's children's plays do not display the most controversial aspects of the movement, but as even association with feminism frequently puts people off with preconceived notions of crazed-bra-burners, it can work in the plays' favour that feminist messages are not blatant. This 'safe' approach, though, must be accompanied by discussion and debate onstage of the issues addressed. These will hopefully resonate within the lives of the audience for years to come, ultimately bringing us

one step closer to a world populated with open minded people willing to address concerns rather than blindly passing judgment.

Lambert's children's plays deal with the struggle of gaining responsibility while approaching adulthood. Kohlberg and Gilligan determined two principles for which people feel a sense of responsibility: justice and care for others. Gilligan took this further and found, mainly with women, that this sense of responsibility could result in a form of self-oppression. This takes place when an individual has difficulty making a decision based on her/his own needs and puts first what they perceive the interests of others to be. One of the morals Lambert's plays is trying to teach is finding a balance between feeling responsible for others and staying true to yourself. In both, *The Riddle Machine* and *Song of the Serpent*, Lambert seeks to stimulate and entertain her audience with a simple story and exciting plot. She breaks realistic conventions, attempting to engage her audience to think about the conventions that govern their everyday lives, and to evaluate and question oppressive attitudes and behaviours.

Appendices

Chronology

Dates of plays indicate production dates; publication dates are italicized to the side

1933

August 23, Elizabeth Minnie Lee is born in Calgary, AB to Christopher and Bessie Copper Lee, the oldest of three daughters.

1946

Betty Lee's father dies

1947

So Much More (short story)

1948

Dance of the Moon (short story)

1950

No Yesterdays (short story)

The Unloved (short story)

Betty spends a summer at the Banff School for Fine Arts

1951

Betty graduates high school in Calgary

Betty moves to Vancouver to study Philosophy and English at UBC

1952

Betty Lee marries Frank Lambert

1956

Prairie Fire (short story)

A Woman in Love (short story)

The University Life (short story)

The Pony (short story)

1957

Betty graduates from UBC

Don't Bring Him in the House (short story)

Them as Has Pride (short story)

1958

The Bequest (To Reach an Understanding) (radio play)

The Lady Upstairs (radio play)

1959

The Best Room in the House (radio play) 1985

Death Watch (radio play)

1960

The Good of the Sun (radio play)

The Annuity (radio play)

The Dark Corner (radio play)

Dr. MacGregor and the Case of the Constant Suicide (radio play)

The Seagull (radio play)

Return of the Hero (television play)

1961

Dr. MacGregor and the Case of the Curious Bone (radio play)

The Sea Wall (radio play)

The Summer People (radio play)

Lilacs and Lilies (television play)

1962

The Doctor's Dilemma (radio play)

Prescription for Love (television play)

This Side of Tomorrow (short story/television play)

Betty and Frank Lambert get divorced

1963

Dr. Macgregor and the Case of the Persistent Poltergeist (radio play)

The Three Sisters (radio play)

1964

Lambert's daughter, Ruth Anne, is born

1965

Lambert begins working at SFU

Once Burnt, Twice Shy (radio play)

1966

The Riddle Machine (children's play) 1974

Falconer's Island (radio play) 1985

The Devil's Disciple (radio play)

The Portrait of a Lady (radio play)

1967

Song of the Serpent (children's play) 1973

1970

World, World, Go Away (children's play)

The Visitor (radio play)

1971

The Encircling Island (radio play)

When the Bough Breaks (television play)

1972

Once Burnt, Twice Shy (short story)

1975

Sqrioux-De-Dieu (adult play) 1976

The Last Dinner (short story)

1976

The Apartment (television play)

1977

February

CBC's 'The Magic Lie' airs Lambert's episode 'The Infinite Worlds of May Be'.

"On writing for children: Or, You Can't See the Audience from the Trapeze," (article)

1978

Guilt (short story)

1979

Crossings (novel)

Clouds of Glory (adult play) 1979

Grasshopper Hill (radio play) 1985

1980

Grasshopper Hill receives an ACTRA Nellie Award

Nobody Know I'm Here (short story)

Bring Down the Sun (American publication of *Crossings*)

1981

Jennie's Story 1981

Jennie's Story receives a Chalmers Award

1983

February, Lambert learns she has lung and liver cancer

November 4, Lambert dies of cancer

1985

Under the Skin (adult play) 1985

Unedited Interview with Joy Coghill and Jane Heyman

Joy Coghill was the founder of Holiday Theatre, Canada's first exclusively children's theatre company, and the director of the original production of Lambert's *The Riddle Machine*. Jane Heyman was the original director of Lambert's *Song of the Serpent* and asked by Coghill to join the interview.

March 13, 2007, Vancouver

Joy Coghill: I haven't read either play in close to 40 years.

Mary Shearman: That is okay

Coghill: It was right at the beginning of my career so ...

Jane Heyman: Which is a long time ago.

Coghill: A very long time ago and it was also that I was less conscious of what was going on then too, because I was so overwhelmed with the whole thing. Everything was new. I've been saying that I didn't think it was an expression that Betty's' whole point in children's theatre was to do a good play. I would say "it's got to be absolutely clear in relationships and story line and it's got to have a beginning, middle and end. It's got to have a crisis, it's got to have an exercise point every 5 to 6 minutes so that the audience releases its energy and then they'll be quiet again," and things like that. And I think we were tackling the business of the coming thing that has happened to her since, which is being dominated by your computer.

Heyman: Well and also the whole business of everybody being like everybody else. That the acme of the future was to be a loss of individualities, which the kids broke through.

Coghill: Ah ha! Now that sounds like Betty.

Heyman: Cause we all emerged from cells. We were all identical and ...

Coghill: Yes, that's right. You were in those little pod things.

Heyman: (agreement noises)

Coghill: Wow it's amazing. It was a long time ago.

Shearman: Two children who woke up early was sort of the ...

Heyman: Yeah yeah.

Shearman: They were the hero and heroine ...

Heyman: Yep, that was Patty and who ... ?

Coghill: It doesn't matter we don't remember. Anyway, Betty, yes, whereas some of her adult plays like. What was the one I was in,? I finally got to play the part she had written for me.

Heyman: *Sqrieux-De-Dieu*.

Coghill: Ooohhh, yes.

Shearman: I just read that this weekend.

Coghill: It was *Sqrieux-De-Dieu* I was in. She wrote the granny for me, and I finally played that. That was a hit. Her colleagues at Simon Fraser who were into all these parties with ... , Well whether they actually did well, they

were into all that kind of stuff. I wouldn't put it past them. Malcolm would remember all that. Malcolm was there.

Heyman: Do you see him?

Coghill: What was his name, Malcolm ... Page yeah Page. He would remember all these plays. No, I'm thinking *Jenny's Story* was a real piece 'cause of feminist ...

Shearman: Yeah yeah

Coghill: Screaming for justice and ...

Heyman: What was the name of the last one that she died before ... ?

Coghill: I don't know, but this was the one that everyone ...

Shearman: *Under The Skin*.

Coghill: *Under The Skin*. It was unfinished. She didn't have time to. She was meticulous when it came to editing. She would edit... One playwright that didn't mind pruning and cutting out things that weren't necessary. And she ... um she didn't get to do that with *Under The Skin*, so I often wished she had lived just a little bit longer to do that. It's not the bitter shocking play now that it was at the time. I can remember Pam Watkin coming to me and saying "We can't do this, Joy. It's terrible."

Shearman: Hmm

Coghill: Now the other play is the one that Jane, you commissioned.

Shearman: *Song of the Serpent*.

Heyman: Did I commission it or did you commission it?

Coghill: We overlapped.

Heyman: We commissioned it and then I did it. I was in the first production which was because of you being the artistic director and I directed it as the first production when I became the artist director at the Metro theatre.

Shearman: hmmm

Heyman: And that one, I mean there were two driving forces. Frankly, I think one was that there was some VC centennial, so there was money to commission a play about VC History, and so that was what that was based on. And then the participation aspect came straight from Brian Way. In fact, from my knowledge of Dorothy Heathcote, I mean from actually seeing her work and studying with Gavin Fulton several, maybe three, years after we did this. This is not Dorothy Heathcote's stuff at all, and in fact it wasn't even very good Brian Way stuff. Because it was basically stuck on at the front. I used to do it, at least on the tour.

Coghill: What was stuck on the front?

Heyman: Well I would come out and do 15 minutes of sort of group, maybe not group ...

Coghill: In other words, Chris ... Bunch of garble ...

Heyman: Yeah.

Coghill: Child's drama and children's theatre mixed together.

Heyman: Before the play ever started, and then there was a certain point in the ... , Because I played the whatever her name was ...

Shearman: Hurdy Gurdy

Heyman: Hudry Gurdy Girl and at a certain point in the middle of it, and I can't even remember where, probably around the chase—there was a chase in it somewhere around there—I came out and did another thing with the kids.

Coghill: But it wasn't part of the story.

Heyman: Well it was sort of grafted. It wasn't even integrated as much as Bryan used to, because the audiences were too big. We were still ... I mean that was the first time we lowered the audience. We lowered the audience to something like three hundred, which was like enormous because you can't even— you can't do that kind of theatre with more than a hundred or a hundred and fifty kids in the house.

Coghill: And on the floor.

Heyman: And on the floor, and to do Dorothy Heathcote stuff. Well I mean, yeah, you could probably do it with a hundred, but basically the children create the play ...

Shearman: hmm

Heyman: Right there with the actors. And that's completely different.

Coghill: And Brian came along, and he came and visited and we did *Story Teller* that year. I think Sidney directed it the first time, but we were great friends. In fact I found this picture of the two of us going through a box.

[Shows the picture]

Coghill: And when he was leaving he said, “Now Joy, do you approve of my work? Do you like my ... ?” I said, “Yes, I think it is absolutely terrific.” He said, “Then you must realize what you are doing is wrong.” (Giggling) And I said, “No it isn’t. I disagree, but to do your work, it will take us two years to gradually be able to raise the money— to know the difference between 35 cents from three hundred kids to 35 cents from a hundred. So we have to educate our touring of people so that we can do this.” And we ended up doing the participation stuff for the kindergarten, for the grade ones and grade twos.

Heyman: We actually did a whole season at the auditorium in Oakridge where we only did participation plays.

Coghill: See, I didn’t know that. I must have been doing something else.

Heyman: No, no.

Coghill: I must have been doing the Playhouse.

Heyman: Well, maybe it could’ve been that, but what I remember in the PR was... You know, that there used to be— there may still be but I doubt it. No, no there isn’t— But there used to be sort of a symbol of a black cat

walking across the screens, you know, saying “For Mature Audiences Only.”

Shearman: Yep.

Heyman: And me and our PR did something with a kitten that said these plays are for children only, and we didn’t allow the parents in. So we had adults in Oak supervising the children, but we didn’t let the parents come in because the parents with little children would tell the children what to do. So the whole point of the children participating would fall apart. But that’s not answering what your thesis is, but that’s what we were. So, when we did *Song of the Serpent*, what we were really doing was sort of the first step towards being able to take participation plays out for the elementary school audience which, by the time Hutch was running Holiday Playhouse, you were in that drama playhouse. That was all we did. We just started doing Brian’s plays, but we played to an audience of a maximum hundred and fifty, which was a huge drop, but we had something to cover it. So I was never sure how Betty felt about that. Because, in a way, we sort of grafted the concept onto the play that she had written. Obviously, she approved it. She allowed it to happen, but I wasn’t part of those or, if I was, I have totally spaced.

Coghill: She was game. I mean she loved playwriting and she would go from the one style to the other style and learn what she could from it. I’ve never seen Betty’s work. I know what was happening at the end, because

when she was ill, I was visiting her almost every day, and she was writing *Under the Skin* and keeping a log. (pause) And I was in all her radio plays that were done at the CBC. And, in the end, in a couple of the stage plays. I thought she was a very good playwright. One of the best. Jane is actually studying your e-mail there.

Heyman: Well I read it before I came here but I ... Well, I'm thinking about ... I was certain in *Song of the Serpent* that all of the main characters were men.

Shearman: Except for what was her name? Annabelle³²?

Heyman: Yeah, whatever the part was Pia played. And then the Hurdy Gurdy girl who was really put into her play so I could ... So that somebody could do it.

Shearman: hmm

Heyman: "Creative" drama.

Shearman: Well, feminism. I'm in a Women's Studies department which is why I'm using the word feminist, but it's a loaded term. But what I gathered from Betty Lamberts children's plays is, it seems to me, that I can derive a sense of just trying to teach— it's a terrible word as well— but tolerance and sort of open mindedness almost ...

Coghill: Absolutely

Heyman: Sure, because that's who she is.

³² The character I was thinking of is actually Priscilla, not Annabelle.

Shearman: And that's what feminism means to me, so that's ...

Coghill: And ethics.

Heyman: 'Cause that's who she was. That's who Betty was ...

Coghill: Yes, so she couldn't help doing that.

Shearman: Yeah.

Coghill: Now the feminist movement, per se— and I couldn't tell you who they were at the time, but I remember going and sitting at the back 'cause I think I was one of the speakers in a meeting of women and it was just before that meeting or after that— the “so called feminist movement” in Vancouver turned on Betty, and said she wasn't a feminist.

Shearman: Now that's after *Crossings*?

Coghill: That is after the book came out which glorified sex so much.

Heyman: I think that's when I was in England, cause I remember reading *The Feminine Mystique* in 1966. I was pulling an all nighter with Hutch, getting the sets and props ready for one of the goings out, and I was sitting doing laundry in a laundry mat reading *The Feminine Mystique* at, like, three in the morning. Trying to digest Betty Fridan to try and stay awake. But I wasn't really even ... I was 22. It's really interesting, 'cause it's the kind of thing that you know that in the last twenty or thirty years... It's something that I would think about, you know, when I was working on stuff. You know, like working with a playwright on developing something. Does this part have to be played by a man? Why are you doing that? Is it

really intrinsic to who the human being is here that it has to be a guy? Or is it just because that's habit? You know, it would never have crossed my mind that it was sexist.

Shearman: It was definitely interesting that the robot in *The Riddle Machine* was originally played by a female, 'cause ,when I read it, I definitely pictured a guy, actually, with ...

Coghill: Oh did you?

Shearman: ... But with ... Being very maternal.

Coghill: So maybe we were making ... Yeah, I think we just chose the best actor we could find, and Dorothy was quite formidable when she acted. And by then she had a son, so she was interested in children's theatre.

Heyman: But then Robyn Marshall who played it, who was a man. The man who played it on the tour was equally ... It was different. It was very interesting

Shearman: So you were touring manager when it went to Montreal?

Heyman: No, no, I was the ... By then Joy had moved to the Playhouse and I was Artistic Director of Holiday Theatre, so she directed the tour, but when the plays opened, Joy directed the plays for the National tour. But when they opened in Montreal, at the big theater there ... , Place des Arts ... they needed to ... somebody needed to take them in and set them up, and so I went out to Montreal for a week and did that.

Coghill :I was talking to someone, I don't know how much use this is but it's interesting, I was talking to a beautiful woman. What was Sheila's second name? Sheila Langston who is studying with the great psychologist, the woman in Toronto. So she studying with her in order to become an expert on spiritual development or whatever. And she was saying, "I have to choose my field." And one day she came here to talk to me and she said, "What about the men that had resulted from this feminist movement? There is something terribly wrong in there. They lost the old business of they're in charge simply because they were born a man. If you like the Victorian principle, which is a little too broad a definition but anyway, they always have had that and suddenly this is not so anymore. And it's as if they have learned the right vocabulary and almost the right behaviour, because they have to be careful of all these women who are taking over the world. Something has happened to their inner being, their soul if you like." And she thinks she might specialize in that part of society, and I think that is fascinating. And I think if Betty had been given a little longer to live, I think she would have concentrated on that. And we would have had a play, an adult play, not about the struggle for women to find the balance with men, but that it's got to be rebalanced. And how do you do it? I think it's important that the western world find those balances 'cause I think it's really bad right now. So that's just knowing Betty. I think that's what would've happened. She really appreciated men and I think she said

to me right in the middle of dying of cancer, when I was going every day and bringing her lunch, she said to me one day, and I've heard it from other people who were ... young women who were dying have said, "I always thought there would be one more affair. I thought I would have one more relationship." So I think that's a balancing statement. And I don't know that I have said that to anyone. I might have said that to Cynthia but I don't think so. And what happened to Betty, which was interesting, is she over dramatized everything. Everything that happened to her, she dramatized it.

Shearman: We're talking about her personal experiences?

Coghill: Yeah, her experiences in her life. If somebody made a pass at her, "they tried to rape her." You know, she would go all the way with emotional experiences. She would dramatize them to the point of ... You probably get that if you go into her diaries and things. The incident of the plagiarism incident, I don't know if you happened upon that. She was the first person at Simon Fraser as far as I know, certainly in the English department, to accuse someone of stealing what they had handed in. And she refused to give up on it. And it was somebody important. And they just wanted her to be quiet about it or just ... And she wouldn't do it. She was not like that... Where was I heading with that?

Shearman: You were at "dramatizing life events".

Coghill: Dramatizing life events. And somehow when it came to facing cancer, it was so dramatic, death and the end of life that she couldn't dramatize it. She was as simple and straightforward and brave. Calm as anytime that I ever knew her. 'Cause of what was happening to her there was no way of making that more serious.

Heyman: So are you getting other questions you would like to ask? Or are you getting the information that you needed?

Shearman: Yep, I just wanted to talk to people who knew her and worked on the shows and what not. I can ask a couple questions?

Heyman: No, no. I just wanted to make sure that you are getting what you want.

Shearman: Oh totally, just the experience. Any experience of working with Betty Lambert, or working on the two specific plays or random memories from her life, and knowing her and that sort of thing. I do actually have one question. I don't know what triggered it a little while ago. Do you know why she stopped writing children's plays?

Coghill: We didn't ask her to write another one.

Heyman: Market.

Coghill: Nobody else was. Green Thumb didn't exist. There was only Carousel, grew out of Holiday Theatre with Elizabeth Ball who was a child in our classes. What happened was I went into the Playhouse and then

when I got fired, I went to the Okanogan for a year then to Montreal to do

...

Heyman: And basically, Holiday Theatre got folded into the Playhouse.

And shortly after that they stopped. They started ... They dropped their season of doing plays in Vancouver and they focused only on touring.

Coghill: Touring Shakespeare and stuff.

Heyman: Well, yeah. But they did tour plays that weren't Shakespeare ...

Sharon Pollock wrote that play ... I mean they sort of ... Anyway, and then

Christopher Newton decided he wanted to have a theatre school and he

couldn't have a theatre school while still touring. So they killed the school-

touring thing and as a result of that happening Carousel got started, then

Green Thumb started. And then, by then, she was not their playwright or

she wasn't alive. And Green Thumb is entirely a political challenging, if

you like, social challenging theatre. Going after problems that children

have in school and day-to-day. So they chose some of their best

playwrights. By then she wasn't alive. Well, it was started by Dennis Foon.

Well ... Yeah, she still was ... I think it started in 1978 or 79, but Dennis

started it, and Dennis was-is- a playwright, so all the plays initially were

done by Dennis. And it was a different generation. Dennis Foon then was

probably in his twenties, late twenties, and he and John Lazarus wrote a lot

of those plays in which the children were the protagonists and that was the

big shift. That the children were the protagonists and that had not

necessarily been the case before. Well, I just think that, I mean ... I didn't know Betty a patch as well as Joy did, but the thing that I remember about her is how I would characterize her as a feminist, that she was a woman who didn't try to be a man. And she was a woman who was proud of her relationships with women, and that's not to say that she didn't also have lots of relationships with men, but that my sense of growing up at that time was that most... That the message was the important people in the world were the men. And to encounter women, and growing up in Vancouver, at that time was extraordinary because Joy was a director, Yvonne Firkins started a theatre, Dorothy Somerset was running the theatre department ... There were models of women who ...

Coghill: But this was post war. It started during the war, all those women.

Heyman: But this was after the war, and in many cases after the war the men came back and the women stepped back and the men took over again. And in Vancouver there were women who were still doing important things and were holding down the roles that were traditionally the guys' roles and that was extraordinary.

Coghill: I was the first woman to be an artistic director of a national company. I often think that if they had known how important the job was at the Playhouse, they would have never offered it to me. They didn't realize ... There were only four theatres; so the whole business of being a women in artistic ... It's the same story as Emily Carr- you couldn't be a

professional painter unless you were a man. You couldn't be a professional anything- like a stage manager had to be a man. Then suddenly a woman from the National Theatre School got in there and became a stage manager. Within two seasons, all the stage managers were women. Any career where there was suddenly an opening, the women would move in. I lived through, and Jane partly lived through, that transition.

Heyman: I was one of the first female stage managers in Vancouver and it was ... I was short and I was young and what those stagehands put me through in order for me to prove that I could actually do it was phenomenal ... But the point about Betty is that, you know, there was never a sense in dealing with her that she would rather be working with a man. You know, it was like all these unspoken things that there was, you know. So there was a sense of coming into Vancouver and working with women who were powerful, as well as working with men who were powerful, and going, "Well, why not? Well why couldn't I do this." The board of Holiday Theatre offered me, when I was 23 years old, the job of artistic director to replace Joy. Well, if the artistic director of Holiday Theatre had been a man, they would have never had done that. It would never had crossed their mind. It would have years to go. The fact that Joy moved on and I had been her assistant and it was ... I still look back on it and go, "How did that even happen?" But it did. And it's ... You know, now you look out there and there are more women in power, not enough but there are more, and there

is some kind of a balance. That, for me, is the big thing. 'Cause I mean, I worked, for instance in Toronto briefly, for a children's theatre company that was also run by a woman. But it was completely different because it wasn't according to what I considered my feminist principles, which have something to do with looking at structure differently and it not being hierarchical in the same kind of rigid way that it is under a more fraternalistic existence. That it's more, that it's ... The difference in Vancouver, where Joy surrounded herself with people who were strong and shared the work ... And a it was inclusive, it was not like that in Toronto. She was a woman, but she may as well been a guy. It was sort of like Margaret Thatcher. The sex organs are different but beyond that, what is there?

Coghill: Yeah we went through that. But here we never used as I remember... We always used... It was a team that was running Triumba. That was the children's theatre. There was the touring section and there was the Playhouse. And we always said "we". And we had crisis meetings every Monday, as a I remember, where we made a list of twenty things and tackled the top three.

Heyman: On the back of an old envelope. Yes. Absolutely!

Coghill: And that was one of the differences between the male and the female. But there were women who got into positions of power who did it the old way. Tougher to deal with and still are tougher to deal with than

the men were in the old days. I think we got into the theatre because nobody realized how important the theatre was. So Betty is part of that.

Heyman: Absolutely. I can remember giving- making- suggestions and being heard respectfully. She didn't have to agree with me, but she heard it and took it seriously. And I can remember... I mean most of the other playwrights, in fact all the other playwrights I worked with, were men. Was there another woman in there? Paddy [Campbell] was doing stuff in Alberta, not with us. I think they were all men. Granted, I mean, I very well could be making this up.

Coghill: We made six children's plays the season before.

Heyman: I'll say here Eric Nicol... that guy from Quebec...

Coghill: All the men were playwrights. All the playwrights were men.

Heyman: Because there weren't that many women who were playwrights, you know. So this was a woman, who wrote a play, and suddenly there were there were roles for women. There were more roles for women because if you look at the cast lists, well, mind you, in *Song of the Serpent* there wasn't. Well, there goes that theory. Anyway, well the fact... Really the thing that I really remember is that I could- I could speak my mind with Betty and be listened to, whereas when I spoke my mind in ... With other playwrights I was condescended to and I didn't like ... Joy didn't condescend to me but the guys did. "Oh yes, you're young, you're a woman, you're whatever."

Coghill: I think you can pin down Betty's' attitude about this business of the sexes and a woman's place in *Sqrieux-De-Dieu* better than any other play. Because the granny I played in *Sqrieux-De-Dieu* is with a sense of humour and getting a lot of laughs. Carries in a huge, I mean the entrance, is a huge cactus which obviously is a phallic symbol. Huge like this, and she carries it in, so there's your first laugh. Then she has, as I remember, a soliloquy after that which is about her husband's death. But those two women's parts were the wife. I mean the joke of the wife wanting to be the mistress and the mistress wanting to be the wife is some of the greatest feminist stuff that there is in our plays. It's brilliant and it's genuinely funny. I mean the audience just loved it at the Lennoxville festival and the audience absolutely went crazy. But if that play didn't have that first scene where it's a party with a woman covered with whip cream and something awful like tomato ...

Shearman- Ah. Ketchup.

Heyman: Yes.

Coghill: If they didn't have that first scene, if they had knocked that off, and just told the story of the wife and the mistress, ah, it's perfect. I could see discovering her point of view about women. I always remember Susan Wright played the mistress.

Shearman: Gracie.

Coghill: And Lally Cadeau played the other one and their scene where they talk about, “Well I wish I was you.” “I wish I was you” is brilliant writing. And was ... You know, maybe it’s dated now, but at the time it was dead on. And the man’s long story about his first night in the Vancouver hotel is so funny that the actor has to practice not letting them laugh, not letting them laugh, until the end. Otherwise, he would get stopped so many times that you wouldn’t know where you were by the end of it.

Heyman: Is that Bryan Tallkey?

Coghill: No, it was the fellow ... Damn, I can see him so clearly!

Heyman: Sorry. I didn’t mean to interrupt.

Coghill: No, it wasn’t Tallkey. It was tall man, that had an eye like mine. And played the lead in Patty’s’ show that she wrote about the newspaperman. Bob ... Bob ...

Heyman: Right.

Coghill: Anyway, he had an entrance where he picked up his briefcase and on the last show, Lally and Susan filled his briefcase with weights. And he went to pick up his briefcase and he went, “What is this?” And he had to haul this briefcase around in this scene. And it changed all his timing, and he was furious. He was so furious he cried. It was just dreadful. He was so angry that they had gone and messed up his work. They were wrong, they were naughty, but it went to their heads that there was a balance between the women and the men in the show. Okay, so I’ve done what I said.

Children live a play; they don't watch it, therefore it's a big responsibility. What they have to say has to be absolutely clear, clear. And the quality of the thing has to be such it's more interesting than their play. Otherwise, they will sit out there and play and make a noise. And there's got ... And she only used one parent ... And there has ... Remember Corpy saying there has to be a line for parents? 'Cause if there isn't a line for parents then the parents talk and make a noise. So there's a story line in there for the parents and you could see... In Chicago, the father in *King Midas* when he went and turned his daughter and said, "Look, look what's going to happen!" And this little girl would say, "I know daddy." The father was getting excited. The rules, yeah the rules. Clear, clear writing. And clarity and fairy tales are good stuff. But Betty was up to creating her own stories and that's what we tried to do with that play. I think that's all. I think that's all that we can say. I loved her.

Heyman: I think that *The Riddle Machine* should come back. It's a good play. Somebody should do it.

Shearman: I loved both of them, to be perfectly honest.

Heyman: Oh yeah?

Coghill: Yeah. They are both good plays, I think, but they're not ... They may be Carousel stuff but they are certainly not Green Thumb stuff.

Heyman: Are you from Vancouver?

Shearman: I'm from Ottawa and came to SFU.

Heyman: Chief Dan George played a native character in ...

Shearman: Oh yeah?

Heyman: He was in his early twenties ... He was ...

Coghill: Yeah. He was a boy when he did Joe.

Heyman: Yeah.

Coghill: Yeah.

Heyman: Whenever. I always remember him

Coghill: He's huge now, you know. Like he really is a chief. He really carries a lot of ...

Heyman: He use to sit us down and say ... You have to understand ... In the 1960s who you ... We did work with Chief Dan but ... Well, for me, that was just a really amazing experience to have her have created a role in which a major character was a native character for children. That's pretty ... And we were able to cast an actor like that ...

Coghill: How did we get the French fellow? Did we bring him from Montreal or was he here?

Heyman: You mean?

Coghill: Jacques.

Heyman: For The Riddle?

Coghill: Well, he was in both.

Heyman: That tour ... Oh, you auditioned him. He had just graduated from NTS.

Coghill: Ahh.

Heyman: So, I think you auditioned across the country.

Coghill: I don't remember, Jane. I don't remember doing that, Jane.

Heyman: I could be wrong Joy.

Coghill: They go out of your head and then a little thread... Especially this awful business of going through boxes.

Heyman: But you were having a baby, too.

Coghill: Yeah, 67 was incredible.

Heyman: This was right after the baby was born.

Coghill: I had my son, I sent the tour out, I directed the opera in Ottawa ...

Heyman: You became the artistic director of the Playhouse.

Coghill: I didn't recover for ten years.

Heyman: David was born in March and you started at the Playhouse, well, you took over in the summer.

Coghill: Very challenging. What else can we say about Betty?

Heyman: I can't think of anything unless ...

Coghill: I mean, but Mary's in touch with Zimmerman.

Heyman: Good.

Coghill: And she's writing a book about her, so she knows, she's been through all the boxes. You know, she got an award when ... After she had cancer and was going through the chemo and stuff. And that dress that I occasionally ... I brought it out for my fiftieth wedding anniversary. That

dress ... You don't have to tie it around the waist you can just leave it like that. She borrowed that that dress and went off and got this medal or certificate or something in Toronto. I don't know what that was, it wasn't the Order Of Canada ... It was some kind of ... Was it a drama award or ... ?

Shearman: ACTRA Award maybe? Or was that earlier?

Coghill: I don't know. But anyway, she went off and did it and made a speech and came back. And I still have the dress.

Heyman: I just ... I just ... I always wished I'd known her better because really, I left Canada in 1969, and came back in 72 and I left again, left Vancouver in 77 ... So, really, when she was doing an awful lot of her stuff. I do remember that when she died I wasn't even in Vancouver. I wish I had known Betty Lambert better 'cause I worked on three shows that the other one ... What was the one called that you directed at the Arts Club? That had the ...? What I remember about it that Peter and Betty were in it, that Shirley was in it and there were magnolia blossoms.

Coghill: Yeah, I know it came up.

Heyman: 'Cause I was ...

Coghill: One word. "The something ..."

Heyman: Anyway ...

Coghill: Cause it's on the list. It's on your list. And it was a Playhouse and it was done in the Playhouse, too, and it was at the where? Seymour Street Theatre.

Heyman: I was ... I was her assistant or something.

Coghill: And Lionel stage managed it.

Heyman: That's right. And I was your assistant.

Coghill: Don't remember any of that, I remember doing *Tiny Alice*. See, the person that knew Betty best was Gerald Newman, and he died two years ago. The person, the producer that knew her that did her superb radio show, the last one which is called "The ..." It was Rob Chesterman that did it and it won all the prizes that there were to win. And it was a two hander, and on the air Kate Reid played one part, and the fellow that played was the original Judge in *Rita Joe*- played the other part. He was ... They were breath taking, but he was fantastic. You have to get a copy of that, what was it called?

Shearman: That's not *Grasshopper Hill* is it?

Coghill: Yeah.

Shearman: Okay.

Coghill: So, you have to get a copy of that and listen to that. That is her best of all. It was very subtle because it is one relationship. And it is a man and a woman. And it is the most convoluted and subtle and the performances are superb. Now that man is still alive but he is very ill. I doubt he is well enough to give an interview. Now that Rob Chesterman got cancer he's starting to plan his memorial with Don. Anyways, meeting to plan his memorial but ...

Heyman: But ask. Because even if he says no it would be wonderful for him to know that somebody wanted to know, and that's the kind of thing that's ...

Coghill: I'll give you his phone number.

Shearman: Excellent.

Coghill: *Grasshopper Hill* is ... If you want to know Betty and try and understand her that's the one where ... You can't tell ... And it's based on one of her lovers too. So the thing is, on one hand he's a survivor and on the other he's, as I remember it, quite evil. And I can remember driving to New Westminster for some event and having to pull off the road and sit and listen because it was so fantastic and intense that I couldn't drive and listen to it. And I didn't want to miss it. And at one point Rob let me have a tape of it, but I had to give it back. So he's very careful of who he shares with so whether he has written something about Betty, I don't know.

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