

**From Our Sex to Our Souls: Directing Michel Marc Bouchard's
*The Madonna Painter***

Sean Guist

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To Bonnie Girouard and Gail Hanrahan

For the guidance, inspiration and insight. For making me believe in the power of theatre, igniting my passion and challenging me to create nothing but the best. And for showing me first hand the art of telling stories through pictures.

Abstract

Michel Marc Bouchard calls his play, "... a parable of lies disguised as a fable; writ in scarlet pigment, in holy wine and hemoglobin, all the shades of red that flow through us from our sex to our souls (9)." Using these vivid statements as a starting point, I explore my process, inspiration, concepts and choices for the University of Lethbridge production of *The Madonna Painter*, March 20 to 24, 2012, in partial fulfillment for the degree Master of Fine Arts.

Preface

As the culmination of my Master of Fine Arts Degree, I am required to prepare and present a thesis project and a support paper as outlined by the Department of Theatre and Dramatic Arts and the School of Graduate Studies. The thesis project was determined to be the directing of a show in the main stage season. In conjunction with the department and my supervisor, Gail Hanrahan, I selected three pieces that I was interested in directing. These three plays were submitted along with detailed applications outlining an overview of the project, rationale based on the Season Selection Criteria, preference for venue, and casting and design elements to the Season Selection Committee. From this shortlist, the play that would serve as my thesis project was selected. The pre-determined slot for my thesis project was the final show of the season, running March 20 to 24, 2012.

The majority of my thesis is comprised of the thesis project. This paper, in support of the show, describes my process, directorial preparation, successes and challenges in design and actor work, as well as a scene-by-scene breakdown of directorial concepts and choices. It is my intention that this paper provides a detailed overview of my directorial process, from the very beginning of ravenously tearing through plays in hopes of finding *the one*, to the finished project, as it was on opening night. Complete with pictures, this text is not a research paper, but a written account of *my* process and *my* production. This paper is the final culmination of two years of fulltime studies, over a year of which was focused on this project. It contains an account of my work as director

on this project, an outline of learning experiences from throughout the process, and sets a framework for the future as I move forward in my career as an artist.

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It was my distinct pleasure and honor to work on Bouchard's beautiful play, *The Madonna Painter*; a process that both invigorated and challenged me as an artist-director. I could not have gone on this journey without the committed cast - Cole Olson, Erica Barr, Ryan Reese, Makambe K. Simambe, Ali DeRegt, Danielle Funk and Benjamin W. Goodwin – who I am indebted to for their brave, truthful and heartfelt performances, and who never questioned the path they were on as we pursued the beauty in Bouchard's work together. As well, this production could never have fulfilled or in fact exceeded my vision without the talented designers – Leslie Robison-Greene, Kelly Roberts, and Roger Schultz – inspiring and committed artists who saw and felt where this show could go and took it there.

To the entire department: students, staff and faculty who challenged, encouraged and supported this show, this degree, and myself every step of the way. I could not have made it through this degree or to Opening Night of *The Madonna Painter* without the commitment, time, dedication, and overwhelming sense of community that I felt from every single person I encountered. In every casual conversation, class, rehearsal and encounter, I was constantly reminded of why we make art.

Special thanks to my Supervisory Committee: Dr. Shelley Scott, Lisa Doolittle, External Examiner Wes D. Pearce, and my Supervisors: Gail Hanrahan and Jay

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CHAPTER ONE

My Journey with Bouchard

I read countless plays in pursuit of a piece that resonated with me, and would hold my attention and focus for the next year as I embarked on my thesis project. It needed to have depth, great characters, an interesting story and have something that sparked my interest as both a director and as an artist. I was searching for a play that allowed me to explore my own aesthetic and push me to develop my conceptual style and directorial skillset.

I soon found Michel Marc Bouchard's *Lilies*, a meta-theatrical memory play rife with poetic language, imagery, theatricality and room for a director to make bold choices in this gay, Romeo and Juliet themed story. It is a play that would make a perfect thesis project; unfortunately it would not be mine. *Lilies* has a cast of nine men, and the pre-determined slot for my show was the last main stage of the season, with *Hamlet* as the show prior. I knew that casting an all male show would be difficult, and I would likely spend more time teaching acting to younger acting students than directing a show, so I set *Lilies* aside, but kept reading within Bouchard's canon. His style appealed to me, as did his delicate balance of character, story and theme. *The Coronation Voyage* was a contender with its blend of story, theatricality and strong characters; *The Tale of Teeka* was beautiful and haunting but I didn't want to delve into the worlds of puppets or Theatre for Young Audiences; *The Orphan Muses* and *Down Dangerous Passes Road*, both family dramas did not appeal to me. Bouchard's most recent play, *The Madonna*

Painter had just had its English premiere in Toronto in 2009 and was just released in print. I tore through it and found exactly what I had been so excited about in *Lilies*. *The Madonna Painter* had the same style of poetic language, multiple layers of story and beautiful characters for actors. It also provided plenty of opportunities to explore my conceptual and aesthetic style as a director, and rich research options.

The Madonna Painter has been through several incarnations since its first inception in spring 2002, written while Bouchard was in residency at Teatro dell Limonia de Seasto Florentino in Florence, Italy. It was later presented at a staged reading, translated into Italian in that same year by the same company, winning the Primo Arte Candoni for best new foreign-language play. This version was then published and given a full production in November 2003 at Teatro della Limonia, and later remounted in Rome. In April 2004, The French premiere was in Montreal at Théâtre Espace Go directed by Serge Denoncourt. The English language premiere, in a translation by Linda Gaboriau was in Toronto at Factory Theatre in November 2009, directed by Eda Holmes (8-12).

My vision for this piece was to create a beautiful and theatrical production within which the story and characters of Bouchard's play exist. Theatricality, in my vision, would engage the physicality of the stage and its limitations while involving creative design and production values that focus on representation rather than realistic presentation. Theatricality celebrates and embraces the artifice of theatre in its representations (Saltz), using creative implementations within the confines of the physical stage space, such as the drapes that represent trees in one scene, a doorway in

the next and later on are pulled down to become a funeral shroud that covers the length of the stage. While at the same time, truthful performances exist within this theatrical world as juxtaposition; these honest performances are outside the realms of naturalism, marked by characters driven by environmental and economic forces in everyday life, and realism, marked by candid and complete pictures of characters and society (Postlewaite). Each character constantly strives for fulfillment in either expressing their secret desire or suppressing it in their quest for beauty. Every single character has a dark, hidden secret that comes out in their pursuit for beauty, a quest that is never realized and inevitable comes to a tragic end. This play would present me with the opportunity to work closely with a smaller cast to find the truth in every single breath, line, moment, and scene, creating truthful, natural performances. My immediate vision for this piece was to create a beautiful, haunting, tragic and theatrical production that juxtaposed truthful performances with a highly theatrical style, from a set that would be constantly changing, and tableaux that would flow in and out of each other. The quest for beauty is at the heart of *The Madonna Painter*, a theme prevalent in much of Bouchard's other work as well. I had found the piece that would be the first choice on my list of proposals to the Season Selection Committee, along with Mieko Ouchi's *The Blue Light* and David Hare's *The Blue Room*. *The Madonna Painter* was chosen to serve as my thesis project in March 2012,

CHAPTER TWO

The Interview

Soon after *The Madonna Painter* was officially selected as my thesis production, I contacted Michel Marc Bouchard via his website. Directing a contemporary Canadian play could potentially offer me the unique opportunity of speaking directly with the playwright about the work and also offered me the ability to ask Bouchard specific questions I had about this play and his body of work to assist me in my thesis based research. Within a few days I had a response; he would be happy to connect with me via Skype sometime over the summer.

A few months went by, and I had not heard from Bouchard, so I contacted him again in late summer to discern if he was indeed still interested and able to work my request into his busy schedule. He replied stating that he was indeed still interested and apologized for the lack of response but he was about to embark on a much-needed vacation after what I found out was a busy summer of engagements across Canada and Europe. We corresponded and finally chose a date in October to connect via Skype. He requested a written copy of the questions I had prepared prior to the interview so that he could be familiar with both the content, but also with English, as French is his first language.

With great trepidation I began compiling and editing a list of questions. I was both excited and tremendously nervous. This was a Governor General's Award winning playwright and a prominent figure in the Canadian theatre scene, and he was taking time

to answer questions from a graduate student in Alberta. After much deliberation and in conversation with my supervisor, Gail Hanrahan, I sent off this final draft of questions:

- Why does the French version include the deformed angel character while the English translation does not? How would you feel about adding it back in?
- Why did you re-write the play for an English audience?
- What inspired you from your childhood as you mentioned in the introduction?
- What do you want the audience to think when they leave the theatre?
- What is it about the pursuit of beauty that you find so appealing? I find it relevant in *Lilies*, *The Madonna Painter* and *Heat Wave*.
- Could you speak as to your use of the element of threes: three Marys (*The Madonna Painter*), three brothers (*Down Dangerous Passes Road*), three Elizabeths (*The Coronation Voyage*).
- How important is the specific time and era, or is it more timeless?
- What impacts you more as a writer and artist- character, story, or theme? Which of these is this play about?
- What should I be sure to experience on my trip to Quebec since I am not familiar with Quebec culture, or Catholic culture?
- How should the audience feel about the combination of sex, beauty and religion?

The interview was inspiring and informative. Bouchard was so supportive and willing to speak about the play and answer my questions, he also offered to connect again if I had any more questions as I began working on the play, and told me to keep him informed. Bouchard's intelligence, wit and passion came through in his answers, and I left the interview with a renewed sense of excitement about my work on his play. This interview changed my vision of the show in a few ways.

First, I was originally interested in including the character of The Deformed Angel contained in the original French versions. This character observes and comments on the action of the play, and I was drawn to this theatricality and wanted to include it in my production by having a Deformed Angel character present, observing and communicating through movement rather than text. When I asked Bouchard about why he had not included this character in the English version, he said that he was not happy with the first two versions and in translation rewrote the play, focusing on the story and the journey of The Young Priest rather than an impressionistic style. The character was beautiful and theatrical but it took away from the style of the show and added too much fear. He went on to say that in Italy, where the show was originally written, the audience responds to a more impressionistic style in theatre, like in paintings, but in America, the audience responds better to an impressionistic background and a story driven foreground.

This led me to question whether Bouchard writes from story, character, or theme, because I find all three equally prevalent in his work, in particular in *The Madonna Painter*. This was a concept I was struggling with directorially, from which direction should I approach the play? Is it best to make it a character piece, or more of a thematically driven piece? Or is it best to come at it in terms of story and let the story and arc be the most important element? With this play, I really felt like it could be approached from any of these, and I wanted to ask Bouchard about his thoughts on this and let that inform my decision. He mentioned earlier in the interview that in this play, he sacrificed some of the theatricality in favor of the characters and their journey, allowing the theatricality to exist in the background, which meant that the theme was important

and needed to be a constant presence in my production, but as Bouchard says, more in the background. Speaking in terms of his process, he spoke of how easy it is for him to write characters, but a good character is not necessarily the story, so the story comes first and the themes make their way into the play:

I know the crisis I know so why write, it's a bit boring to put words in this character, so that is why you know with this fixation I need some time to discover the theme, the subject of the play during writing it (Interview).

This made clear to me that *The Madonna Painter* is, as Bouchard calls it, a “story tale.” The play revolves around the journey of The Young Priest, and it is his story that needs to be told. The theme, this pursuit of beauty, needs to be transcendent and present, always hanging over the action of the play but never pulling focus from the story that was being told. Bouchard said that he likes to create and find layers for his stories, and that was what I took away from the interview as my task, to create a show with multiple layers - the characters, story and theme co-existing as layers inside of the play.

In my reading of Bouchard's other work, two things struck me: the prevalence of the theme of the pursuit of beauty, and his use of threes, both present in *The Madonna Painter*. He explained this dominant theme as fascination, and its presence in his work is not just beauty of the body but of the soul: the beauty of arts, the beauty of body and the beauty of men. He describes how he had to discover beauty because it was not present growing up, there was no categorization for beauty in men, it was absent. Bouchard also remarked that this pursuit of beauty and the searching for it is an essential element of our world now. This statement really impacted me; from my first read of the play I saw how

current this theme was in a world where success is often judged by beauty and society strives for physical perfection in both men and women.

When I asked Bouchard about his use of threes, from the three Marys in *The Madonna Painter* to the three Elizabeths in *The Coronation Voyage* and even the three brothers in *Down Dangerous Passes Road*, I was expecting him to speak to the holy trinity of his Roman Catholic upbringing permeating through his work. Instead, what I got was a laugh followed by a statement of being confused by this question, as this use of threes was not intentional but clearly present. He then went on to describe the three Marys as a chorus, "...they are more archetypal, more grouped together, three different ways to see something" (Interview). This description was pivotal in my approach to understanding these characters; not only their function in the play, but also their relationship with each other. Bouchard called them sisters or muses, and this was exactly how I approached them, a chorus of sisters that were there to offer three different viewpoints that aided the action of the play and the journey of the Young Priest. While Mary Anne, Mary Frances and Mary Louise were on the shared journey of discovering the beauty of womanhood, they went about it in vastly different ways: Mary Frances outwardly exercises her sexuality, Mary Anne naively denies it until it manifests in her relationship with the Young Priest, and Mary Louise experiences it vicariously through reading the used sheets of others as she tells their fortunes from the creases and smells left behind. Mary of the Secrets embarks on this journey as well, though unwittingly, in her role as Alessandro, the Painter's chosen model.

I had been planning a research trip to Montreal, and asked Bouchard what, in his opinion, I should experience or observe. He then told me not to go to Montreal, but to Quebec City instead to take in the sights and experience Quebecois culture. He suggested specific museums, in particular Musée de la Civilisation with several exhibits on the history of Quebec and church expositions to get a feeling for the important role that the church played in Quebec culture, especially the pivotal role it plays in *The Madonna Painter*.

At the end of the interview, I posed the question, what does he want the audience or the director to feel about the combination of sex, beauty and religion? Bouchard's response became the basis for my vision and approach to the show in every way, from designing to staging to creating specific theatrical moments. He said, "I hope that they are leaving with a print, a picture, an idea, a sentence, something like that. But they can't hold all the play. It's impossible..." (Interview). This eloquent expression became my mission statement. My task was to leave the audience with as many prints, pictures, ideas and sentences as possible. From this came my concept for the Epilogue with the Young Priest in the midst of a sexual ascension and Mary of The Secrets emerging from the depths dressed as a bride stained in red, the theatrically stark staging of the flagellation and mutilation scene, the folk song underscoring The Doctor's monologue to create an eerie beauty, and the revelation of The Young Priest in The Prologue first as a man, then as a priest.

CHAPTER THREE

Historical Research

The Madonna Painter takes place in a small village in Quebec in the Lac-Saint-Jean region in 1918 from late summer to the armistice, November 11, which ended World War I. While this is a very specific period in history, I was struck immediately by how timeless the play felt and indeed this sentiment was echoed by Bouchard in both his Author's Note and in my interview with him. When I asked him about the specific time and era he responded by describing the premiere at Factory Theatre in Toronto as more 16th Century inspired than 1918 specific or even present day; he went on, "I mean this idea to leave more of a print, an anecdotal thing because it is not a play about the Spanish Flu, it's not just so period" (Interview).

Francis Hodge and Michael McLain in their book *Play Directing* drive this point further, "(a) playwright is not writing a history but telling a story; he may not know history well at all, or he may be deliberately shifting the facts to suit his own purposes" (19). They say that as a director, your job is to record the facts as the playwright prescribes them, not necessarily how history describes them. This is not a historical docu-drama or even about a historical event. While the play is concerned with the Spanish Flu, it is not concerned with the exact details, in fact it is best to just consider it a plague just as the Young Priest describes it, a plague sent from God like many others. By doing so, what becomes important is the story around the plague, rather than the plague itself or

even the time period in which it happened. Bouchard is telling a story, he is an artist not a historian, and has chosen to tell that story in a certain time and place.

Following this, as an artist as well, I chose to do the majority of my historical research in Quebec as a tactile, hands-on experience to truly capture the essence of the culture, feeling and place of Bouchard's story. This is what I sought in my visit to the museums. *People of Quebec: Then and Now* is a permanent exhibit at Musée de la Civilisation that visits Quebec's history with special attention to the church's influence.

This exhibit is a depiction of the rich history of the church in Quebec, from children's toys of altars to 17th century Bishop's robes, including religious themed needlepoint, Communion gowns, lanterns and crosses from outdoor services and other religious objects from the first churches built over three hundred years ago. These objects illustrated first hand what a pivotal role the church played in the day to day life of the people of Quebec and how truly ingrained it was in their life. The church was part of every aspect of life, from birth to death, integrated into the political environment as well as the educational environment, as children were sent to schools run by nuns and it was considered an honor to have a child choose to follow the path of becoming a nun or a priest (Musée de la Civilisation: *People of Quebec*).

Seeing these artifacts up close and discovering their meaning and importance gave me great insight into the lives of the characters in the play and into the Quebec culture depicted. There was also brief mention of conscription in WWI in this exhibit,

which Quebec fought against because they did not support the British Commonwealth in the war, a contentious issue that led to the French-English mêlée concerning the deserter soldiers mentioned in the play (Musée de la Civilisation: *People of Quebec*).

Another exhibit at the museum featured artifacts from Rome, many of which had never left Italy before. *ROME: From the Origins to Italy's Capital* contained over three hundred artifacts and featured an era-by-era visit, from Ancient Rome, through the Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque periods to modern Rome. This unique exhibit put me up close with religious images: paintings, statues, carvings and tapestries from multiple time periods. Seeing the richness, beauty and detail and experiencing these works of art so intimately was awe-inspiring and had a considerable impact on my research. Although the play and my research was not centered on Rome, it was a unique opportunity to experience both religious works of art and some of the Italian culture which impacted Bouchard when writing the play in Florence (Musée de la Civilisation: *ROME*).

CHAPTER FOUR

Pre-production Directorial Preparation

COLLAGE

At one point during the summer of 2011, I felt very overwhelmed by this play. *The Madonna Painter* consists of multiple layers of character, plot, theme, and meaning with great potential for staging and design but it is also very open to interpretation in terms of style. The production could be theatrical, naturalistic, expressionist or impressionistic, and I saw it as a juxtaposition of these styles.

I was struggling, in particular with what The Epilogue should be, what it meant, how it should be staged, and how it tied into the rest of the play, especially the journey of the Young Priest. I wanted this moment to, simultaneously, be theatrical, jarring and eerie yet beautiful. In fact, I saw the play to be this juxtaposition but found it difficult to put into words and was concerned with how I would communicate my vision to the designers. My supervisor, Gail Hanrahan, suggested that I create a collage.

This collage would not only clarify my own vision of the show, but would force me to put my ideas into concrete terms using color, line, shape, quotes, images, and textures. It would also be a great communication tool to present my vision for the show to designers in a tangible way.

I started by collecting colors and textures from scrapbook paper, then images from magazines, and quotes from the play.



Fig. 1 *Directorial Collage*, July 2011. (photo: Sean Guist)

On to a white background I began layering pieces of scrapbook paper. These reflected the colors, textures and patterns that I envisioned while reading the show: red, blue, burgundy and shades of beige and sepia much like a canvas. The patterns and textures were intricate paisley and fleur-de-lises, a symbol of Quebec, and a bold cutaway pattern, like intricate stonework on a Roman column. These reflected my visions of both the Quebecois setting of the play, but also Bouchard's inspiration in the city of a thousand Madonnas, Florence, where the show was first written. I added two columns of color gradient from deep red through to white that seemed to be stained with paint splatters.

I found an image from a magazine of draped white fabric so I included this as a representation of Mary Louise's sheets. The use of color, texture and fabric in this image was also symbolic to me of a possible design element. I added a black and white picture

of actor James Franco with a crown of thorns, clearly depicting Jesus. This beautiful man encased in religious iconography became my depiction of the Young Priest. I blacked out his eyes, added red tears and reddened his lips to illustrate my version of the Young Priest in the Epilogue, mutilated and blind but still sexualized. Rather than cutting these images with scissors I chose instead to rip them, having rough edges instead of clean, sharp lines.

To capture the influence of Italy and also to represent Alessandro, the Painter, I used a picture of the coliseum in Rome. The play was originally written in Florence, and Bouchard says that he was inspired by the city as well as by the Italian painter who painted the triptych in the nave of the church in his hometown so I wanted a strong visual element depicting Italy. As a representation of the pursuit of beauty, a strong element in the play, I included a cut out of LOVE written in dark red script on a background of what looked like a page ripped out of an old diary.

As homage to *Lilies* as well as a representation of the painting of the Virgin Mary, I used a picture of white lilies. The Young Priest describes the Virgin Mary in the triptych as holding a bouquet of white lilies, a symbol often associated with The Virgin Mary in religious paintings. *Lilies* was the play that led me to *The Madonna Painter* and this was my own tribute to that piece which launched Bouchard's career as a playwright and my own interest in his work.

As an illustration of the time period of 1918, I found a picture of a vintage postage stamp, a photograph in sepia tone of two men in suits on bicycles, and what looks to be a sepia toned death certificate. The last two images are my representation of both the war and the flu, as I colored over the men's faces in red as if they had fallen victim to the plague.

I used three religious paintings in my collage, Cosmé Tura's *La Pietà*, Duccio di Buoninsegna's *The Three Marys at the Tomb* and Klimt's *Death and Life*. During my research into religious paintings and iconography, these were the three images that stuck out to me as truly communicating what the show was about, and I tried to incorporate them into the show in some way; through blocking as in *La Pietà* when Mary Anne is in the lap of the Young Priest, color as was the case in *The Three Marys at the Tomb*, or in feeling where I drew upon Klimt's work in creating my vision for the Epilogue. I drew three crosses in black ink, these were quick, rough sketches and were included to symbolize the power of the church, both within the play but also within the lives of these villagers in 1918 Quebec.

Lastly, I included two quotes from the play on the collage, the first from the text of the Young Priest in the Epilogue, "A black bride carrying a deformed cherub in her arms. And a long red trail behind her..." (91), which became my inspiration for conceptualizing the staging and design elements for this moment. The second came from Bouchard's Author's Note, and was a starting point for me both in terms of the color palate for the show, but also in terms of how the show was meant to illustrate the human

experience, “Writ in scarlet pigments, in holy wine and hemoglobin, all the red that flows through us, from our sex to our souls...” (9).

Compositionally, I tried to create a balanced visual, rather than grouping images or patterns together to communicate meaning or intent. I wanted there to be less of a narrative, and more of an overall look or mood, which, for me, is what Bouchard has done with *The Madonna Painter*, which is almost episodic in structure. Existing between the Prologue and the Epilogue are twelve tableaux combining mood, theme, atmosphere, poetic language, character and plot. So in my collage, I strove to do this, on a background of virginal white, images, text, colors and patterns communicate my vision of the production’s aesthetic qualities. The colors and textures of my collage became the starting point for Schulz’s set design, the red fleur-de-lis pattern was used to paint the floor shroud of the set, and the two paint splatter pillars became an exact replica of the drapes. The starting point for the color palette of the set, costumes and props was derived from my collage, with the raw unfinished edges and sepia tones influencing the natural fabrics of the costumes and the canvas of the set fabric.

PRODUCTION MATRIX

George Black in his book, *Contemporary Stage Directing* describes a unique form of directorial analysis based on the concept of the director-artist, a production matrix, which searches the text for structures, patterns, and motifs as well as associations with external images, patterns and structures, leading to the insight to shape a production (82).

Black's analysis of sense image patterns and motifs in the text struck a chord with my own connection to *The Madonna Painter* and Bouchard's own statements, both in his author's note and in my interview with him where he describes, "...all the shades of red that flow through us..." (12) as well as how he wants the audience to take some element of the play, an image or sentence with them when they leave "(t)heatre exists in time and space and is composed of complex sense stimuli" (Black 87). This describes exactly the approach I took in creating images, moments of theatricality, and a stirring of the senses through the use of light, color, movement and sound. I set out to create an aesthetic object such that the audience could take from it a moment, an image or a feeling.

The other notion that Black outlines in his production matrix is to free associate theatrical styles, giving the production an inner life rich with vitality that conveys a certain feeling, attitude or interpretation (96). He describes the list of possibilities as limitless but that specificity must be used to "evoke a particular complex of shapes, rhythms, images and techniques" (95) and that the director must be "willing to accept the work of their imagination" (96). I combined this free association with the exploration of other art forms for *felt* connections rather than with strictly symbolic ones (Black 101). In such a way, I free-associated not just other theatrical styles, but other art forms and styles of art. Through this process I developed this list of potential forms and styles for *The Madonna Painter*:

- a. Expressionism
- b. Impressionism

- c. *La Pietà*
- d. Puccini's Grand Opera
- e. Klimt's *Death and Life*
- f. A Rosary
- g. A David Lynch film

What I uncovered impacted both the style and the shape of the show. A combination of Expressionism and Impressionism, both in terms of art and theatre, marked by direct influences of David Lynch's films in depicting disturbing and mystifying imagery and Puccini's grand opera in terms of theatricality and lyricism. *The Madonna Painter* is a series of tableaux strung together like the beads of a rosary.

From this list came the staging and design that was both theatrical and atmospheric, depicting mood and feeling rather than physical reality; this symbolism is common to Expressionistic works, combined with the open composition and movement in Impressionistic works (Patterson). I melded the two together and mixed in Lynch's combination of sex, mysticism and imagery, particularly in Tableau 11 during the flagellation and mutilation and The Epilogue. The blocking in Tableau 10 is reminiscent of *La Pietà* but reversing the roles in the painting as Mary Anne lies in the lap of the Christ-figure, The Young Priest.

Puccini is noted for his use of defining characters with specific lyrical qualities in their music. In my production I used several French-Canadian folk songs to define each of the village girls in terms of character. Mary Anne has a love song, Mary Frances has a

rambunctious ditty, and Mary Louise a lullaby; these distinctive choices reflect their characters in both the lyrics and style of each of the musical selections. Puccini's work is also noted for its grand theatricality in staging, exemplified in his Grand Opera *Tosca*. I drew upon this notion of grandness and theatricality in the staging of The Prologue with the reveal of The Young Priest amidst the flying drapes and in The Epilogue with the reveal of Mary of the Secrets with a long flowing veil during The Young Priest's ascension.

A rosary is inherently religious, specifically Roman Catholic. Each bead is connected in a continuous loop, with each bead and section having its own title and prescribed prayer or count. Though in prayer one starts at the cross and continues around, visually, one could start anywhere on this loop and continue forward or backward but always arrive in the same place, the cross. Similarly in my interpretation of the shape of *The Madonna Painter*, each tableau is a bead and each bead has its own prayer or count but they all add up to the finale of the rosary, the cross, or in the case of the play, The Epilogue.

FRENCH SCENE CHART

A French Scene Chart is a tool for understanding a play used by many directors. It involves breaking the play down into units. Generally speaking, each unit takes place between an entrance or an exit. In the chart itself, the director then analyzes each unit for

length, characters present, as well as technical requirements such as sound or light cues, as well as costume requirements such as a pocket for a notebook.

In their book *Play Directing*, Francis Hodge and Michael McLain take this basic analysis even further by adding two more devices of analysis to each unit, describing the basic action of each unit as well as titling each unit with a nominative phrase (34). While they admit that the titling of units is not an accurate description of each unit, "...it is still quite useful because it gives you another handle for understanding a scene and holding it in your memory" (Hodge and McLain 34).

The French Scene description of the basic action of each unit forced me to look beyond the poetic language and resonating themes of *The Madonna Painter* and focus clearly and succinctly on what plot points occur in each unit, and then understand how that affects the next unit and so on, so that I had a very clear understanding of not only the plot of the play, but also what needed to be communicated to the audience in each unit. This task for this play was difficult and I found myself being too descriptive or thinking too broadly outside of the specific unit. However, forcing myself to distill the action to its basic core was not only a great exercise to understand the plot, but also to refer back to in the rehearsal room when working a scene to always bring it back to the core action of that unit. I not only kept a copy of the French scene chart in my book, but also a copy of just the action and titles of each unit and distributed it to the cast at the first read through so that we all understood the core action of the play.

Hodge and McLain's titling of each unit is a way of conveying the objective for each scene; while not actable phrases (34), they are simple statements that allowed me to summarize the scene beyond the core action in a more subjective way. A metaphor, such as the stations of the cross, in titling units that involved The Young Priest, or in a simple nominal phrase that summarized that unit, such as Prayer or Secret. These titles reflected the meaning of the unit beyond the action in a more artistic understanding, which allowed me to work my concept or metaphor into a simple, objective analysis. This was incredibly useful in my own understanding of the play and in how I wanted each unit to impact or affect the audience. It also became beneficial as a communication tool in speaking with the actors about what the unit was *about* instead of simply what was *happening*.

HODGE AND MCLAIN'S PLAY ANALYSIS

Hodge and McLain also outline a system for a detailed play analysis, which builds the foundation, structure and façade of the playscript (17). Through a meticulous break down of the given circumstances, previous action of place and character, polar attitudes, significance of the facts as well as an analysis of the dialogue through sound, recurring images and motifs and word usage as well as meaning of title. I assembled all of what I knew of the world of the play, the characters and Bouchard's intent. This process forced me to understand the play based completely on the playscript alone.

The biggest revelation I had during this process occurred in an analysis of what Hodge and McLain call philosophical statements, pieces of text that reflect the author's outlook, morality, rational, and ideals. Bouchard describes in his Author's Note this play as, "...a collision of ecstasies, a bouquet of lies disguised as a fable" (10). This statement from the playwright himself brought me to the understanding that this play is not one thing, but many things: the creation of the painting, the sexual awakening of Mary-Anne, the death of Mary Frances, Mary of the Secrets' emergence from the shadows, The Doctor's search for the soul, and the arrival of The Painter. These have collected at an intersection point in a collision; this collision is the journey of The Young Priest.

CHAPTER FIVE

Design Process

Once *The Madonna Painter* had officially been selected and approved, I approached Roger Schultz to design the set and lights. I knew that these two elements were most important to achieve my vision of the show with scenes that flowed seamlessly together; a talented and veteran set and light designer could help bring this to fruition easily, and beautifully. I knew that having an experienced faculty designer on those two design elements might mean that I would end up with senior student designers on costumes and sound. Luckily, Schultz agreed to design the set and lights, while Leslie Robison-Greene, faculty costume designer signed on to design costumes with resident sound designer Kelly Roberts rounding out the design team.

SET

I met with Schultz early in the summer to talk through some initial ideas and concepts. I brought along my collage to illustrate what I saw in the show in terms of colors, textures, images and feeling. Schultz saw the show in exactly the same way. It was at this meeting that he saw the set covered in fabric, like the Shroud of Turin or a painter's canvas. The big question that struck us both was how to present the inherent Catholicism of Quebec that was central to this play to a prairie audience. What did they need to see in visual representation that a French Catholic audience would not?

Schultz and I were in contact over the summer and met again in the fall to go over some sketches. He had sketched an early version of what would become the set. It consisted of two boardwalks that intersected, running from stage right to stage left and from upstage right to down center, creating a cross. Two platforms of different height jutted out over the orchestra pit, dramatically changing the traditional proscenium stage shape and space. Schultz said he saw the play as a vast open space and wanted to push the borders, legs and all masking as far back as possible. He talked about using the blacks upstage to our advantage and to light the set in such a way that would allow for actors to be revealed from the darkness. I told him how excited I was by all of these ideas and that with such a simple set I wanted to use it in every way possible. I wanted all of the space to become playing space, but also to be able to create intimate scenes within this vast and open space. Working within my concept of a theatrical production that used representation instead of reality, the physical stage space could be manipulated to become every setting necessary through suggestion, from inside the Doctor's house to the village square to the banks of the stream. In the Epilogue, the Young Priest is supposed to ascend in a flight of mystical ecstasy, and I talked to Schultz about how I wanted to make this moment a distinct, unusual and memorable moment, depicting his ascension. He suggested putting an elevator in the set, hidden below the intersection of the cross that would allow for the Young Priest to literally be lifted in the air. I also showed Schultz pictures of my trip to Quebec, especially of the boardwalks, stone walkways, church architecture and religious statues.

The next time we met he had a model of the set. The raised platforms and cross boardwalk were wooden slats, much like the wooden boardwalks I saw along the Saint Lawrence River in Quebec City. The entire floor was covered in a neutral canvas shroud on which a fleur-di-lis type pattern was painted in shades of red. On stage left there were five identically painted hanging drapes that could fly in and out to create different looks, stage pictures and spatial configurations. Directly in front of these panels was a walkway that would allow for a table to be rolled on deck from the wings for the Doctor's house. Schultz had designed a black fabric flat upstage that had a hidden doorway at the extreme upstage of the boardwalk for a secret entrance for Mary of the Secrets. This flat would then be flown out, revealing a cross cutout with the cyclorama behind it, allowing the cross to be illuminated in different colors and patterns. The stage right platform was lower than the stage left platform, and the boardwalk was chair height, so could be used to create levels, and act as furniture for the actors to sit on. In the stage right platform was a trap that would open, allowing the fabric to sink into to create The Field of Secrets. The set was beautiful and practical, and I emphasized to Schultz that I wanted to use it in every way possible. With the orchestra pit removed, I asked for a trap and a way for Mary of the Secrets to emerge from the pit in the Epilogue when I wanted her to re-appear as the vision the Young Priest is seeing. He was excited by this prospect and agreed to incorporate it into his design. As well, Schultz spoke of fans mounted in the fly gallery and under the set to move the drapery panels and the floor shroud as wind is referenced several times throughout the play.

My process is to rough block the show before beginning the rehearsal process, so Schultz and I next met to talk through the drape configurations. The drapes were designed to move to create locations necessary to the play, but also to create different stage pictures. Once again I told Schultz that it would be great for the set, in this case the drapes, to be used in every way possible. The drapes would be constantly changing since this show was sparse in terms of furniture and set pieces, and I wanted this element of visual interest. We decided that the show would start with the drapes out and would fly in one at a time during the Prologue, because we wanted all of the drapes to be in and pooled on the floor to create trees along the banks of the river for Tableau 1, which would then be repeated when the action returned there in Tableau 8. The village square was created in Tableaux 2 and 10 by flying the two drapes upstage to high trim, and having the downstage drapes create a doorway. The Doctor's house was created in Tableaux 3 and 9 by flying all of the drapes up at staggered heights, the furthest downstage drape at the highest trim and the furthest upstage drape at lowest trim. The drapes were flown in further to create The Field of Secrets in Tableau 4, allowing for the fans to blow the fabric. After Mary Frances' death in Tableau 10, Mary Louise speaks about how her sheets have been taken to wrap the corpses in, and I thought it would be useful for all the drapes to be gone to visually echo this sense of loss and emptiness. I also made the suggestion to wrap Mary Frances' body in a drape, so Schultz and I came up with the idea of rigging the two drapes that created the sides of the doorway to be able to be pulled down by actors. When these two drapes were pulled down, the remaining drapes would fly out and the remainder of the play would occur on the empty stage, which would also get the drapes out of the way before the reveal of the cross cutout.

In addition to the drapes, Schultz had also designed the hidden door for Mary of the Secrets in Tableau 3 and the cross cutout which would also serve as an exit, as well as a series of baskets that contained garlands of flowers and a lantern that would be placed along the boardwalk for Tableau 6 when the audition scene takes place. The table for the Doctor's house would be on castors with chairs placed on top for the actors in the scene, it could be easily rolled on and off stage by a single actor, with a drawer in the front to store a liquor bottle and two glasses.

During the rehearsal process the only challenge with the set became the baskets for the audition. They were designed in such a way that it took three actors to carry the parts: basket, garland and lantern, and then these would be assembled onstage. With six baskets, this became not only tedious and time consuming, but also very distracting to the action happening around it, a very important monologue delivered by the Doctor. So I scaled back the design and had the baskets pre-assembled so all the actors had to do was quickly and easily carry them onstage and place them along the boardwalk. Schultz wanted them to be more elaborate, so we compromised. The baskets would be pre-assembled but the actors would also place three long stem roses alongside the basket, an efficient, easy but beautiful effect.

In early discussions, Schultz and I had talked about ways to depict the ascension of the Young Priest in the Epilogue. Roger's suggestion of an elevator in the cross boardwalk proved to be both too costly and time consuming to build, so instead we opted

to have the actor rigged into a harness and fly. This solution would be both free, as the theatre already owned a harness, and efficient time-wise as nothing needed to be built, and the costume, a cassock, could easily accommodate the necessary riggings. When we reached technical rehearsal and tried this moment, it never had the ease and beauty that was necessary. It was clunky, messy and there was no way of hiding the hooking up of the harness to the cables no matter how it was re-blocked or relit. So, after trying it twice, I cut the flying and instead opted for an actor driven moment that focused more on a sexual ascension. This alteration was a much better fit as it put the focus on the Young Priest's sexual awakening and his sexual ascension. This change, made for technical and artistic reasons, was the right conclusion to the journey of the Young Priest. His journey culminates in a combination of sexuality and religion, prevalent throughout the rest of the production, and showed how his own pursuit of beauty had tragic consequences, leaving him faceless and blind, but now aware of his own sexuality.

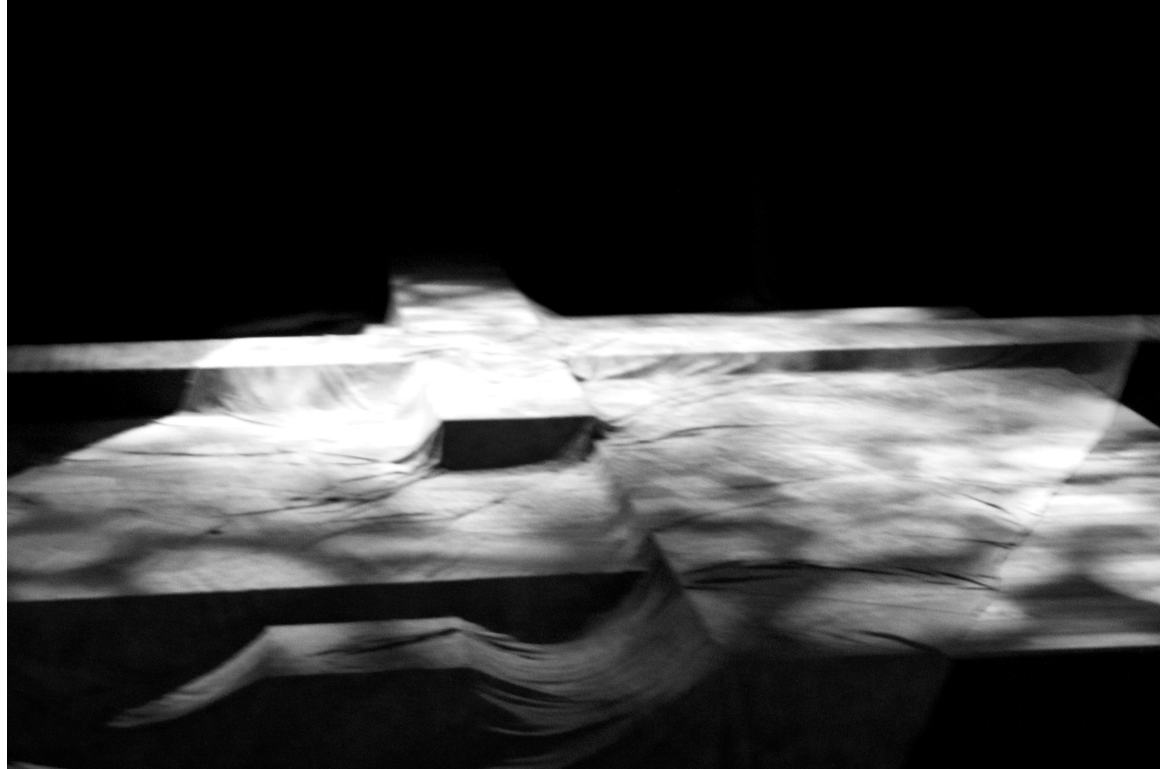


Fig. 2. *The Madonna Painter* Set. University of Lethbridge, March 2012. (photo: David Barrus)

LIGHTS

Roger Schultz was also the lighting designer so as the set discussions progressed, he would also mention ideas or concepts for lighting. I think he designed the set keeping the lighting in mind. With such a sparse set, it was the lighting that defined the space, creating vast expanses or intense and intimate moments. The lighting needed to not only create mood and atmosphere but also distinguish and create locations. He had spoken early on about utilizing several tightly focused specials and very tight shutter cuts to avoid spill and also to allow for the actors to appear from and disappear into the darkness without the use of traditional wings.

Schultz's design was subtle yet intricate with an expert use of color and texture. He used multiple cues within master cues to shift light in a subtle way, as the actors moved across the stage the light seemed to follow them and define the space they were in. Rather than having large areas, Schultz had smaller areas of light that allowed for these subtle transitions and shifts. He used gobos to create color and texture on the fabric of the stage floor, as well as gobos and rotators on the panels to create different looks for each scene location. For the banks of the stream, blue gobos and gobo rotators on the panels were used to create the reflection of moving water.

At the moment when the cross cutout upstage was revealed, it was illuminated with white light, which immediately placed the action inside the church. This cross cutout was then used throughout the rest of the play, with a textured breakup gobo during Tableau 12 and finally glowing bright red during the Epilogue as the Young Priest ascends on his mystical flight of ecstasy.

Schultz is a great lighting designer and really understood our shared vision for the show. For the most part, I loved every look he showed me in cueing. His use of color, texture and movement turned a vast open space into every location through light, from the banks of the stream, to the village square and inside the church. I asked for several specific lighting cues from the outset. That the Young Priest in the Prologue be lit onstage rather than entering into light so that we see him first as a man then as a priest. As well, that Mary Anne be lit in red as well as the Young Priest during the flagellation

scene to illustrate her sexual awakening. Schultz made these requested moments even more beautiful and theatrical; with each whip The Young Priest became illuminated in a red light that gradually built in intensity and Mary Anne was lit with red light with each hit of the whip that also intensified.

During the technical rehearsal process the only lighting requirement I had was that the actors bringing in the baskets before the audition not be fully lit, so that the light of the lantern could be seen, and also so that it was not distracting from the action happening on stage. This was a constant struggle that went on until the last dress rehearsal. The issue was that there was spill upstage where the actors were entering, the baskets were placed on the boardwalk which was lit for the rest of the scene and there was no way to get this action to happen in darkness, so Schultz tweaked continuously until we arrived at a compromise that worked for both of us and within the limitations of the light hang.

Roger Schultz and I worked well together, from our first meeting until the last dress rehearsal the process was collaborative. He would make suggestions to me that would make a moment or a scene easier to light in the way we had discussed, or would make a transition smoother, and I would make suggestions to him, such as the basket change or the drapes being pulled down that would use his designs in a way that hadn't been thought of before. He was also supportive and willing to discuss the show and the concept with me. He was just as committed to making a beautiful piece of art as I was.

COSTUMES

As with Schultz, for my initial meeting with Leslie Robison-Greene, the costume designer, I brought my collage to communicate my vision of the show to her and start discussions from there. I told her that, as the rest of the production was not naturalistic nor period but more theatrical and suggestive, I wanted the costumes to be period because the setting of the play is time and location specific. We spoke about color palate for not just the costumes but also the whole show, which was natural materials and neutral colors, but I also wanted touches of red. Robison-Greene suggested natural fibers, linens, cottons and wools, and silk for the cassock. She also felt strongly about having two or three cassocks for The Young Priest that would reflect not only his change in station but also his place in the social standing of the village, starting in silk in what she referred to as his “fresh off the boat look” and then changing into a cotton cassock as the play progresses. In terms of period, Robison-Greene told me that the women would be in boots and corsets. I told her I wanted a more natural shape and silhouette than the corset would allow for, so we decided to not use corsets but instead to let the natural beauty of the female body be showcased by using sheer fabric for the blouses. Our conversation then moved to the other men. When I described the Doctor as more of a butcher than a doctor, Robison-Greene was inspired to put him in a butcher’s apron. We felt that the Painter should look like a foreigner, an outsider compared to the rest of the villagers. At this initial meeting I told her that I wanted to see a lot of blood. It would be on the butcher’s apron, the bloody packages in the Doctor’s house, and on the Young Priest’s back after the flagellation and on his face as the Doctor mutilates him. I also told her I

would like for each costume to have a hint of red, working in Bouchard's statement, that this show is composed of all the red that flows through humanity; in the case of costuming that could that be red buttons or stitching or an accessory, but not necessarily all the same shade.

As the production progressed, Robison-Greene showed me initial sketches of the costumes and we discussed shape, style and silhouette, but not color at this point as she said that she adds color after she meets with the director and discusses these initial sketches. I had very few notes. My only request was that the Doctor not always be in his full suit, but be able to be in various states of dress, shirt tie and vest, or just shirt depending on the scene as well as having him undress onstage, which meant that he needed to be in period underwear as well. To contrast this, The Painter would always be in full suit with period hat. My notes for the women were that Mary Anne's blouse be able to be unbuttoned on stage and that Mary Frances' and Mary Louise's blouses be cut lower than shown in the preliminary sketches to both showcase their feminine bodies, but also to contrast the much higher neckline of Mary Anne. At this point, I had changed my mind about the blood during the mutilation and flagellation scenes. I no longer wanted to see blood on the Young Priest's face or back; it was too literal and I wanted these moments to be more stylized. We also spoke about having shawls and hats for the women for the audition scene to both have a different look, but also to make it seem like a more formal outing. I told her about my vision for the Epilogue, with the Young Priest flying and Mary of the Secrets dressed as a bride, emerging from the orchestra pit with a long train or veil that was stained red. She took these notes and expressed her concern for the

actors moving around in skirts and heels on a giant piece of fabric, which prompted Schultz to agree to tack the floor shroud down in places. We then agreed to meet again shortly to go over finished renderings.

Unfortunately, this step never happened. For whatever reason I never saw final renderings. The next thing I saw was fabric that had been bought and pulled. There was textured black silk for the cassock, a green striped floral for Mary Louise's blouse coupled with a dark green wool skirt, a rust colored wool skirt with pocket details and a white blouse for Mary Anne. Mary Frances would be in a blue floral blouse with detachable collar so that one version could be blood stained, and a slim fitting dark blue skirt with a large ruffle on the bottom. The suits for the Doctor and the Painter would be pulled from storage, and the Young Priest's two cassocks would be built, as well as his pants to allow for the riggings for the flying harness. Mary of the Secrets' costumes were also built. There was a deep rust color linen for her first costume, a white floral blouse that matched the other women's blouses when she is pregnant and a traditional Virgin Mary costume, white tunic and blue veil. There was also her final Epilogue costume, dressed as a bride with a long train or veil stained red. Due to the sheer length of this, thirty-two feet, we opted for a veil, as it would be both easier to manipulate by the actor and far easier to change into quickly in the trap room.

The rehearsal costumes and shoes came into the rehearsal process late, after the blocking and first stumble through were over. This was quite a challenge for the actors, adding in skirts and heeled boots for the women, a cassock for the Young Priest and

jackets for the Doctor and the Painter, as well as a thirty-foot veil for Mary of the Secrets. Robison-Greene also did not attend a rehearsal until well into the rehearsal process as she was also designing *Hamlet*. At this point, she gave the women a quick lesson on moving and walking in period skirts and heels, especially with the levels of the set.

At the first dress rehearsal I saw the finished costumes. The colors were much brighter than I had imagined, and the silhouettes of the women's costumes were not flattering on the actors playing Mary Louise, Mary Anne or Mary of the Secrets. This may be period correct, but did not fit my vision of showcasing the natural beauty of the women's bodies, the skirts were shapeless and the blouses were not as sheer as I had envisioned. Ryan's suiting made him look very buttoned up and proper rather than an obsessive, masochistic butcher turned doctor. By the time first dress happened, I had cut the flying from the show so there were no issues with working a quick change into a harness or finding a time earlier in the show to put the actor playing the Young Priest in the harness, which would mean that he would be rigged into the harness for several scenes prior. This cut solved the biggest technical costume challenge in the show.

Overall, the costumes fell short of what I thought they could add to the show, both in terms of visually placing the characters in a specific period, but also in adding to some of the theatrical moments of beauty that I had hoped to achieve. This may be due to a breakdown in our director/designer dialogue and process, or perhaps in a lack of clear communication. Or, maybe I had just wanted too much from one design element. Or perhaps it was just a simple scheduling issue, as one designer was over-committed by

designing two shows back to back in the same semester. The lesson I take away from this experience is that, as the director, it is ultimately my show and my call on every element and as such I need to be clear on what I want and find a way to get it, whether that be getting the designer on the same page so we collaborate or by describing in specific details what I envision and trusting the designer to take it from there. The biggest success on this front was achieved in The Epilogue when Mary of the Secrets emerges from the front of the stage, through the fabric draped over the edge of the set dressed as a bride with a long veil stained red, stretching thirty two feet covering the stage and trailing behind her as she exits through the cross, creating a theatrically charged beautiful yet eerie image.

SOUND

Kelly Roberts and I met in early January to begin our preliminary sound design discussion. His first question to me was about whether the sound was period or not. My response was no, which shaped the soundscape of the show from this point on. Roberts talked about having speakers hidden throughout the stage and the audience for the whispers in The Field of Secrets, which would then work their way throughout the rest of the show. He felt strongly, as did I, about using sacred music, Gregorian chants, church bells, and oratorios. I told him that I wanted a constant presence of wind, which Schultz was incorporating with the use of fans to move the drapes, and that this needed to permeate through the play. I also wanted to have the women sing French-Canadian folk songs or hymns that could act as transitions between scenes. So, Roberts set off to find

not only the right sound and feel of song, but also a song suited to each character. The sound needed to support my concept of having scenes move seamlessly from one to the next, and Roberts seemed very excited to get to work.

A few weeks later, we both met with Sandra Stringer-Conlon from the Department of Music. She played a collection of Quebec folk songs from the early 1900's, highlighting a few of the simpler songs which would be easy to learn and which had English translations. We chose a lullaby for Mary Louise, a folk song about a girl in love with a priest fittingly for Mary Anne, a folk song about a girl lusting after sailors for Mary Frances, and an eerie Christmas song about Saint Nicholas eating children to underscore the Doctor's monologue.

During the first technical rehearsal I was impressed with Roberts' sound design. It was guttural and ethereal, beautiful and eerie and captured perfectly the haunting poetic quality of the show. It was the final layer to create the timeless pursuit of beauty with moments of stunning theatricality I had hoped for. Each character had their own sound cue or theme. Mary of the Secrets was an eerie whisper, the Doctor's was the ticking of a clock, and the Young Priest's a Gregorian chant. His design was subtle and captured not only the feeling of the play and the journey of the characters, but also the vision I had of creating moments of beauty, as well as emphasizing the underlying uneasy blend of religion and sexuality.

PROPS

My production of *The Madonna Painter* was minimal in terms of set pieces and costuming with only Mary of the Secrets and the Young Priest having costume changes. A lot of the important elements were hands-on props that became a big part of the show. Head of Props, Patty Baun, not only bought, pulled and built props, but also truly designed them to fit the specific look of the show.

Baun and Schultz collaborated on the baskets for the audition scene, mismatched wicker baskets that were designed in three pieces: the basket, a glass lantern with LED candle inside, and a garland of roses that wrapped around the base of the basket and hooked onto the handle. During the technical rehearsal period, I simplified this for ease of execution to be pre-assembled; but the simple, natural, beautiful design remained, keeping with the natural fabrics, neutral colors and hints of red.

The other important props that appeared throughout the show were Mary Louise's sheets and the Doctor's scalpel. These props are integral to these characters and Baun brought rehearsal versions into the first blocking rehearsal, which allowed for these actors to truly incorporate these intricate props into not only their character work but also into their blocking. Mary Louise spends much of the play with her sheets. As such it was important for Danielle Funk (Mary Louise) to have time to not only get comfortable with a giant piece of fabric physically, but also to find truth and make discoveries with how she handled the sheet depending on the fortune she was reading. For Ryan Reese (the

Doctor), working with the scalpel from the first day of rehearsal allowed him to not only get comfortable with the tool, but also to find ways to use it in character work, pulling it out of a breast pocket and playing with it while the Young Priest was speaking during the auditions for example.

There were several other props that took great care and attention: the painting of the Virgin Mary with the face of the Young Priest, the Painter's sketch pad, the vintage liquor bottle and glasses, the table for the Doctor's house, the Doctor's medical tools and bag. As well, several bloody packages and body parts were built with utmost care to create the most realistic and detailed looking props possible, from the gangrene to the ring on the finger down to the blood encrusted brown butcher paper they were wrapped in. Baun and the prop team's attention to detail allowed for fully functional props that could be used by the actors in their character work, in addition to adding a period feeling and quality to the properties.

CHAPTER SIX

Actor Work

CASTING

The Madonna Painter requires a cast of seven, and every single character contributes to the action in their own pursuit of beauty. I knew that casting would be very important because this show demands not only an ensemble cast, but strong individual performances, so versatile, talented and committed actors were required to go on the journey that Bouchard had written.

The Madonna Painter is an illustration in characterization, as each character constantly strives for fulfillment in either expressing their secret desire or suppressing it in their quest for beauty. All of the characters, with the exception of the Doctor, are within the age range of the majority of the students. The script provides a great acting challenges and is a great opportunity for me to continue my work as an acting coach. All of the characters are rich, complex, beautiful and tragic in some way. Every one of them has a dark, hidden secret that comes out in their pursuit for beauty, a quest that is never realized and comes to a tragic screeching halt. This play presents the opportunity to work closely with a smaller cast to find the truth in every single breath, line, moment, and scene, creating truthful, natural performances.

The play centers around the Young Priest's journey to save his village from the plague. With multiple mentions within the text of his beauty, his beauty becomes crucial

not only to the action of the play and its outcome, but also to my own approach to staging some of the scenes. He is fresh out of seminary school, in his first posting and takes it upon himself to save his village from this plague from God. He is driven both by the desire to save his village, but also in a narcissistic way, he is driven by the fact that he himself could single-handedly rescue his village. The Young Priest is also drawn to Mary Anne, the ingénue from the village, and is torn between his manly desires and his Godly duty. This character goes from innocence to the edge of corruption, from triumph to defeat all the while maintaining dignity and grace, and is the object of desire for both Mary Anne and the Doctor which leads to his ultimate fall.

Mary Anne is a naïve and innocent girl from the village. Like all of the girls in the play, she is in a pursuit to discover her womanhood, though unwittingly at first, she eventually embraces it unrelentingly. She is the victim of a cruel joke at the hands of Mary Frances, who convinces her that a man's "creature" can change shape constantly. She is devout and devoted. Much like the Young Priest, she also goes on a journey of transformation and discovers her womanhood, throwing herself, bare breasted at the Young Priest in an act of sacrifice and sexual desire. At the same time she is also self-aware, prudish to a fault, funny, and an outcast among the girls.

Mary Frances is the exact opposite of Mary Anne, a vibrant and promiscuous village girl who has a command of her sexuality, but is searching for love from the men she meets on the banks of the stream. She is full of life, wit, and sarcasm before this

pursuit of beauty leads to her demise, which she willingly accepts as the plague claims her life.

Mary Louise reads people's futures in their sheets. She finds beauty in their experiences and lives vicariously through them, until her sheets are taken away from her and the bodies of those fallen victim to the flu are wrapped in them. She has an understanding of sex from the sheets she reads and is the most adept of the three girls, composing her own audition piece. Functioning in the psychic realm, she is on the fringe of the Catholic community.

The Doctor is more of a butcher than a doctor, and has gained his wealth from stealing from his patients and the dead. He is the richest man in the village and as such becomes the patron of the triptych at the request of the Young Priest. He is obsessed with finding the beauty that is the soul. Having caught a glimpse of it in medical school with the cadaver of a nun, he thinks he may be able to find it again in the Young Priest.

Mary of the Secrets has a special gift, she hears the confessions of the dying, relieving them of the secrets they have never told anyone, allowing them to pass. This was first discovered when her deformed brother died and she received his secrets. This is a gift she never asked for and one that has garnered a reputation in the surrounding villages. The Painter chooses her to be the live virginal model for the triptych, and she begins to lose her darkness and embrace the light, exploring love and life, only to be plunged back into the shadows and secrets.

The Painter serves as the catalyst, as it is his presence that turns the action. He is an attractive foreigner brought in to paint the triptych in the nave of the church. He changes the course of the play by choosing the girl from the shadows as his model, and in doing so fulfills her pursuit of beauty in experiencing love and womanhood before he throws her away. He is an attractive, charming, manipulative womanizer who makes his living travelling from village to village painting in churches, and leaving girls ruined in his wake.

It has always been my belief that casting the best actor rather than a specific look or type is the best way to cast. I knew that the characters of both the Young Priest and the Doctor needed very strong male actors. The Young Priest goes on a transformative journey and needs to anchor the show while The Doctor has the difficult task of a three page monologue filled with imagery and poetic language and needs to be both charismatic one moment and disturbing the next. The Painter has a unique challenge because not only does he speak with an Italian dialect but much of his dialogue is in Italian as well, though he has the least amount of text and stage time. As far as the women, Mary Anne has the biggest character arc, moving from naïve village girl to discovering her sexuality. She has the most stage time, the added challenge of nudity as well as a lengthy monologue filled with religious imagery. Mary of the Secrets also has a journey from darkness to lightness and back again, but with substantially less stage time; however, she needs to be played by an actor with great depth to create a believable and complex character out of few lines. Perhaps the most challenging female part in the show

is Mary Frances. She needs to be played by an actor with great versatility who can transform easily from a playful sexually charged girl on the banks of the stream to a woman who embraces her death brought on by her own desire to find love, which she confuses with a moment of ecstasy shared with a dying soldier. Mary Louise has several solo scenes and requires an actor who can create context and images with her words, but who is also charming and endearing in a quirky way. I needed a cast of seven strong actors who were able to take Bouchard's beautiful work off the page and create engaging characters.

I knew early on that casting *The Madonna Painter* could potentially be an issue because the show was in the last main stage slot, with *Hamlet* in the slot right before. *Hamlet*, being an epic Shakespearean tragedy, was a cast of mainly men. I knew this would affect my casting, but with a cast of only seven with three men I was hopeful that I could either cast those not interested in *Hamlet* or those holding out to be in *The Madonna Painter*. The other issue with *Hamlet* was that the show was not cast until the very end of the fall semester, and I had planned to cast before exams. Unfortunately, with the hierarchy of the season, and the fact that *Hamlet* was directed by a long standing faculty member and Associate Dean, I was not able to audition until after classes were over. Not only were my auditions missing out on some senior students already cast, they were also late in the semester when some students had already left.

AUDITIONS

The initial audition consisted of a contemporary dramatic monologue, preferably Canadian. It was inherently clear that some actors were far more driven and committed to this project than others, and that made the decision to make cuts for callbacks much easier. I was looking for a few things in this audition; first to see if the actor had the skill and talent necessary for such a challenging show, but also to see if they had the same love of the show and passion that I did. It was very important to me that I find a cast to spend the next three months with that was just as passionate about *The Madonna Painter* as I was and that was committed to creating a beautiful work of art. After the monologue I gave each actor cold reads from the show. As every character has a monologue, I chose a section from each character so that I could see every actor read for multiple parts and see where they might fit best. Then I had a brief chat with them and asked them what they liked about the show, and what character they were most drawn to. This gave me an opportunity not only to talk about the show with them, but also to get to know them and to determine if we could establish a connection, as I did not know many of the actors. It became clear that while there were an abundance of talented women, there were only a handful of men.

The timing of the auditions and callbacks did not affect any of the actors called back with one exception, Makambe Simamba, a very talented actor with whom I had worked previously. I knew that she was a versatile, careful and thoughtful performer, but having her missing from the callback was a definite disadvantage; I could not see her

play a scene with other actors to determine what part she would fit best and who she had the best chemistry with, if at all. So, I held her “in my back pocket” as I went ahead with callbacks, keeping in mind that casting the best actor was the best route.

I called back anyone who I had thought could be cast in any of the roles and who shared my passion for the show. Early on it was clear to me that the only actor who could embody Mary Anne was Erica Barr. I had worked with her for the entire semester in Canadian Plays in Development, the class I was assigned to as my Teaching Assistantship, and I was constantly impressed by her ability to take the words off a page in a table read and in her commitment and boldness when it came to taking risks and making bold choices.

The role of The Doctor is a demanding one, and the only actor up for the challenge and who delivered with both his monologue and his callback was Ryan Reese, a third year actor with a plethora of experience. There were two strong contenders for the role of the Young Priest, but Cole Olson showed both a strength and vulnerability in his scene work, there was a risk in casting him as he had never had a sizeable role before and would be carrying this show, but I was drawn to his sincerity and connection to the role, and he fit the bill as a beautiful young man perfectly. There were a few standout actors to play the rest of the Mary's: Ali DeRegt, Danielle Funk, Rafaela da Cruz and Taylor Fornwald. After reading them in multiple pairings, and having one-on-one callbacks with Taylor and Danielle, I had a cast. Makambe Simamba, who had been absent from the callback would play Mary Frances, Ali DeRegt would play Mary of the Secrets and

Danielle Funk would play Mary Louise. All of the roles were cast, except one, The Painter and my casting deadline was looming. Under the advisement of my supervisor, Gail Hanrahan, I decided to post the cast list immediately, and leave the role of The Painter TBA and have a second round of callbacks in January, as my rehearsals were not beginning until January 30th.

In early January I had a second round of callbacks specifically for the role of The Painter and invited back anyone who I had been interested in from the initial callbacks as well as a few other actor suggested by my new supervisor, Jay Whitehead. I brought in Ali DeRegt to read a scene with the men to determine who would work best in this pairing, since she had already been cast as Mary of the Secrets. The choice came down to two actors, Benjamin W. Goodwin and Jonathan Martin; but there was no chemistry between Jonathan and Ali. Ultimately the part went to Benjamin, who had chemistry with Ali and also was able to take direction and play the scene in different ways. With this late addition, the cast was complete.

REHEARSALS

The first rehearsal was January 30th, which allowed for a lengthy rehearsal period of one hundred thirty hours plus technical rehearsals. This was a challenging show, and as my thesis production, I wanted to be sure we were not short on time. The entire cast, stage management and light/set designer Roger Schultz and sound designer Kelly Roberts were there; the costume designer, Leslie Robison-Greene was otherwise engaged with

Hamlet so she was absent. After brief introductions, Schultz introduced his set and concept. He did most of the talking about the concept we had come up with, and his simple yet stunning set design got the entire room excited. The electricity continued as Roberts talked about his subtle sound design and speakers hidden throughout the set, stage and house. As Robison-Greene was not in attendance, the costume shop manager and I went over costume sketches with the cast. After these presentations, I spoke briefly about my vision for the show, juxtaposing truthful, natural performances with theatrical moments and images. This was followed by a read through of the script.

After this read through the entire team talked some more, sharing their opinions and thoughts on the script and their characters. Then I spoke briefly about what Bouchard had said about the show when I interviewed him in October, how this version is the one he is most satisfied with and how the piece is too big for the audience to take with them the whole thing but instead can only hold on to only a piece: a moment, a line, a picture. This was my mission statement for the show and now theirs: to present an aesthetic object to our audience.

At the second rehearsal, I had scheduled another read through, this time with only the cast so that we could talk in depth about each character's journey. After the read we did some exploration, and I had each of them take a section of one of their monologues and use the text to begin to explore their character in whatever way they felt it affected them, physically, vocally, emotionally or textually. I then had them choose one line from their text that summed up either that moment or their character. After exploring this on

their own, I had them form a circle and begin to share their line with the ensemble, and then to cross to whoever they wanted to speak it to and engage them with their text. This not only very quickly gave the actors a strong grasp of their character but also began to form relationships. This exercise explored several of the major relationships in the show: Mary Anne and the Young Priest, Mary of the Secrets and the Painter as well as the Doctor and the Young Priest.

The next day, to change things up, and lighten the mood of the rehearsal room after such a heavy exploration, I brought paper, magazines, crayons and glue and had the actors make a character collage. I gave very basic instruction to the cast to create a collage of their character in any way exploring color, line, shape, and feeling using the text from the play and the magazines, crayons and paper provided in an hour and a half. I then showed the cast my collage, explaining how useful it was to me to put into a visual form my own thoughts and ideas of the show, talking them through why I had chosen the specific quotes, images and textures. I think this was very useful in using concrete terms to begin to define their characters and to get them out of their heads and into a physical manifestation without using typical actor language.

At the next rehearsal I introduced Authentic Movement, an artistic practice that allows freedom of expression, thought and movement, “(w)ithout instructions, guidance, or music, we close our eyes and turn within to await an impulse that leads” (authenticmovement.ca). I was first exposed to this impulse-based practice while I was serving as Teaching Assistant in Canadian Plays in Development and working on Meg

Braem's play *Exia* with Gail Hanrahan. The practice of Authentic Movement as a character exploration exercise that we used not only brought the actors to great depths of discovery, but did so in a rather quick time frame, which I thought would be perfect for the rehearsal period of this show. I planned to use Authentic Movement as an acting exercise to discover character and to make breakthroughs and connections to new ideas while doing actor work, but also as a warm-up before working rehearsals. I had experienced first hand the benefits of Authentic Movement as a discovery tool but also as a practice, and I wanted to keep warm-ups for the show consistent so that the cast could get into a routine and be prepared for each rehearsal. The cast was split, about half had experienced or worked with Authentic Movement and the other half had not. I gave a detailed outline of the rules of the game as well as why I intended to use it and for what purpose. It proved to be quite successful. Having a standard warm-up at the beginning of every rehearsal, especially one as intense but open as Authentic Movement, when done for twenty to twenty-five minutes got the actors not only incredibly focused on their work and task for the day, but also allowed them to explore and warm-up at their own speed and at whatever depth they felt comfortable on any given day.

Authentic Movement also very quickly established an ensemble feeling within the cast as they often had interactions while involved in the movement, as well as sharing their experiences afterwards. At first, I would guide the movement by giving each actor a question about their character to explore in that session, often a universal question for all: what is beautiful to your character? what is your life in the village like? or what does the flu mean to you? At other times, the actors themselves would come up with questions to

explore. Cole went into one session exploring “why did I chose the priesthood when I am such a beautiful man?” and Makambe explored Mary Frances’ attitude towards death. And as the rehearsal process moved forward and Authentic Movement became more of a warm-up than an acting discovery tool, the cast would explore freely either as a general exploration, or in specific terms to a question they had about their character or the show.

I prefer to set out blocking very early on. I find that actors work better within a framework, and it is also easier to see the show as a whole from a directorial perspective. By pre-determining the placement of each scene and the blocking required within it, I was able to place certain locations such as the riverbank and the Doctor’s house where they could be supported by Schultz’s set (especially the drapes) and light design. The challenge with blocking a show without furniture for the majority of the scenes, using the set itself, such as the boardwalk or the edge of the platform to sit on, was that the actors tended to cling to the boardwalk as actors often do with furniture, not moving beyond a table or chair for example. I had to constantly remind them that their original blocking was to use the whole space. The other challenge that the actors faced was that the set was designed with German borders, without traditional entrances and exits from the wings. What was designed and blocked to happen instead was that scenes or actors would emerge from the darkness on the periphery of the stage, often from far upstage. This took an adjustment period for the actors, but once they understood how the set and lighting design functioned they were able to adapt.

Once the entire show was blocked, I then moved on to working the scenes with the actors, moving through the show chronologically. With such an intimate cast, and with all of the discoveries made through Authentic Movement, this moved quickly and the cast was ready to make discoveries and take risks in their scene work.

PERFORMANCES

Erica Barr in the role of Mary Anne grew exponentially throughout the rehearsal process. As a very talented performer, but one with little experience, I took a gamble on casting her. She managed to find subtlety not just in her scene work but in her monologue work as well. She moved effortlessly from the naïve young girl on the banks of the stream, to the sexually charged woman throwing herself at the Young Priest in an act of passion, religious turmoil and sacrifice. She also has a beautiful singing voice, which I took advantage of in having her linger on stage as a transition between scenes singing a folk song. It was in these unscripted moments that Erica was able to channel the young girl on the brink of sexual awakening as she sang about a girl falling in love with a priest. Her biggest challenge was to make bold choices and keep the energy up when given the difficult task of having her eyes closed for almost half the play. Her charm, energy and ease abounded effortlessly despite the handicap of not being able to use her eyes to portray emotion, a very difficult task that she rose to. Erica also had the task of tackling partial nudity in the show, not an easy thing for an actor to do, especially in their first lead role, but she handled this challenge professionally and by doing so was able to put

the rest of those involved in the production at ease when dealing with the flagellation scene and in doing so created a beautiful moment and stage picture.

Cole Olson in the role of the Young Priest took command of the role and the show after some encouragement. He is a hardworking, driven actor, who like Erica did not have a lot of experience, but who was given the task of carrying the show. Midway through the rehearsal process I saw that Cole was beating himself up when he missed a line or a scene didn't go well for him. I pulled him aside and discovered his nerves. He had never played a lead before and was trying very hard to be perfect. I told him to just relax and start to take ownership of the show. Bouchard had written the journey of the Young Priest and all Cole needed to do was trust in himself to tell that story and really take ownership of the show, to tell *his* story. After this, Cole had a breakthrough and at the next run I saw a confidence, ease and sense of ownership that had been missing. Cole had made several discoveries through Authentic Movement that he brought to the scene work, the most important being a sense of the Young Priest's sexuality, which is repressed within himself, as well as his commitment to God and the priesthood. Cole embodied the Young Priest beautifully, especially in the scenes with Ryan Reese's Doctor and the audition scene in Tableau 6. His intimate scenes with Mary Anne lacked an emotional depth and intensity that he came close to achieving in rehearsal when working the scene, but in performance these moments, though nice moments, could have gone further.

Makambe Simamba, a senior actor with the most experience in the cast, created an endearing, hilarious and heartbreaking Mary Frances. Makambe's struggle came with getting so caught up in the darker moments, that they began to affect her lighter moments. As well, she was missing the sense of fun, lighthearted playfulness that Mary Frances embodies and is so crucial as a balance to the often dark moments in the show. By performance, Makambe was hilarious, full of youthful, frenetic, lustful energy in the opening scene with Mary Anne. Makambe is a thoughtful, careful actor, who at times can get caught up in her head, as I knew from working with her previously. This happened in her lengthy monologue before her death in which she confesses to Mary of the Secrets her quest to find love and beauty in a dying English soldier, and how even though she knew it would kill her, she kissed him. I pushed her to put her thoughts and struggles into the character work and to use it as an obstacle to play with in the scene. Once she was able to do this, she pushed past this block and played the scene with an intense amount of passion, delivering this very challenging monologue effortlessly, riding the rollercoaster of emotional highs and lows.

Danielle Funk was given a challenge in the role of Mary Louise in that most of her scenes are monologues delivered alone on stage. While she has a great command of language, she struggled with translating that language into painting pictures with Bouchard's poetry, describing people's fortunes by reading the creases in their sheets, a starkly strange but intimate image. In the end, her performance was committed and consistent, with a good grasp of the task at hand, but never quite reaching the full potential of where these monologues could go. Danielle is an actor full of grace, and a

bubbly infectious energy and she brought this to every rehearsal and performance. Her biggest success was in the audition scene in Tableau 6, where she got to use her quirkiness and unbridled energy to be a fun, goofy, charming girl trying to impress her audience. In her final monologue, lamenting how her sheets have been taken to wrap the dead in, Danielle was able to root herself in this sense of loss and deliver a striking and powerful monologue using Bouchard's text to its full potential.

Ryan Reese, another senior actor, struggled with the role of the Doctor. The Doctor is a domineering presence in the show, obsessed with the Young Priest's beauty and on a quest for a glimpse of the soul; he is the driving force that brings the show to its climax. This character is dark and twisted. Ryan judged the character's actions instead of embracing them and finding some truth in them. He was never able to get over this initial misgiving, and struggled throughout the rehearsal process to find the controlling, obsessive dark side of the Doctor. His biggest challenge was a three-page monologue filled with dark and disturbing images. Ryan never managed to deliver this monologue to its full potential, despite my working on it with him over and over. He was able to find moments that sparkled, but was never able to connect them to create a cohesive whole. Ryan rose to the challenge of the character in his final scene, drugging and mutilating the Young Priest in a pseudo rape scene. In these final moments, Ryan accepted the Doctor's journey and brought his dark quest to fruition, playing a strong scene opposite Cole Olson, and embracing the added challenge of nudity as he undresses over the unconscious body of the Young Priest, standing naked, scalpel in the air, ready to strike.

Ali DeRegt in the role of Mary of the Secrets brought great energy to the rehearsal process, but struggled with finding a balance between the eeriness and ugliness of the shadows and Mary of the Secrets subsequent emergence into the light. She never quite found the extremes and played the safe middle-ground for most of the show, with the occasional moments of intensity such as her first interaction with the Young Priest in tableau 3, and her final moments with the Painter, when he throws her to the ground and she lets out a guttural scream slowly evolving into a sinister laugh. Her physicality and presence never matched her vocal abilities, particularly in *The Field of Secrets* she never found the physicality I was trying to get from her as she buries her head in the furrows and vomits her secrets out.

Benjamin W. Goodwin, a first year actor, looked the part of Alessandro, the “charming” Italian painter. He was given the demanding task of not only speaking in a dialect but in another language as well. Benjamin’s biggest hang-up came with getting so caught up in getting the Italian and the dialect correct, that he lost a lot of the meaning behind the words and what the character wanted. The struggle with working with him was that I knew the dialect and the Italian were important, and I didn’t want to revert back to using the English text, as we had in earlier rehearsals. He needed the language to become second nature and to stop thinking about the specifics so that he could delve into the actor work: obstacles, intentions and motivations. This just never happened. So instead I pushed him to do what he did best, play a charming foreigner, which he did very well. By the opening performance, Benjamin’s Italian was in much better condition than his dialect and his scene work was much better than his monologue, but Benjamin’s

biggest successes were the scenes in which he didn't speak. He had such an engaging and charming presence that pushed the scenes forward and gave his fellow actors much to play off.

The challenge for the entire cast when we moved onto the set was that in order to not be swallowed up by the open vastness of the design, they needed to make their choices even bigger and bolder than they had been in the close proximity of the rehearsal room. Once on deck, I challenged them with the notion that in our production, "Naturalism is dead."

My vision of having truthful performances that existed outside of realism and inside a theatrical setting was realized. The actors aided in this goal of creating an aesthetic object. Without the truthful performances that led up to the moments of theatricality, the desired effect of the moment and the intended juxtaposition would have been lost. For example, the image of the Doctor, scalpel in hand standing naked over the inert and exposed body of the Young Priest, would not have been as successful as it was without the strong performances of Cole and Ryan in the scene before.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Directorial Choices and Concepts: Scene-by-Scene

To utilize the vast open set, drapes and almost filmic transitions between scenes, I needed a very clear concept for the staging of each scene, placing the action in a specific location and using the set to indicate this, blocking the actors, and creating smooth transitions between scenes that flow in and out of each other.

I struggled with the concept and staging of the Prologue, a short scene not set in a specific location with the Young Priest describing the triptych before he has even arrived at the village. I knew that I needed to approach it as a scene that occurred outside the action of the play, as more of an introduction. To take this even further, I also wanted to approach the Prologue as an introduction to the Young Priest; from this came the idea of the revelation of the Young Priest first as a beautiful man then as a priest. To achieve this, I collaborated with Schultz in the designing of the drape configurations and lighting for this scene and Roberts' Gregorian Chant inspired sound design. Cole starts the show on stage, naked from the waist up, his black cassock around his hips disappearing into the shadows as a warm light slowly illuminates his chiseled face and torso and the haunting chant fades out. He begins speaking as the drapes fly in around him with one of them flying into place in front of him. Behind this drape, he pulls the cassock over his shoulders and emerges into the light now dressed as a priest, he buttons his cassock and continues to describe the triptych as the drapes continue to fly in at different heights and at different speeds resembling a painter's canvas or religious banners as he exits along the

boardwalk. In this brief introduction the audience is introduced to the triptych, the combination of art, religion and sexuality and the beautiful young man who has become a priest, and are made familiar with the theatrical style of the production.



Fig. 3. *The Prologue*. The University of Lethbridge, March 2012. (photo: David Barrus)

Tableau 1 is set on the banks of the deserter's stream. The drapes are flown in from the previous scene to pool on the floor and become trees with blue gobo rotators creating the reflection of water on the fabric. As the Young Priest is exiting on the boardwalk stage right from the Prologue, Mary Frances enters directly in front of the stage right boardwalk, singing a few bars from a French-Canadian folk song about a girl lusting after sailors, as Mary Anne begrudgingly follows her, sitting on the extreme downstage of the stage right platform, legs dangling over the edge with the cascades of fabric that flow into the orchestra pit becoming the river bank. She then closes her eyes,

and Mary Frances finds a perch on the boardwalk, gazing through the “trees” into the river to watch a naked man bathe, describing it in detail, weaving her way through the “trees” frolicking as she teases Mary Anne with descriptions of the man’s “creature” until she becomes the “creature” and crouching beside Mary Anne blows on her face, fondles her hair and grabs at her breasts until Mary Anne proclaims her death, staged in a three phase broad comedy style. As Mary Anne awakes, and the joke is revealed, Mary Frances flees the forest on the stage right boardwalk as The Young Priest enters through the “trees” on the stage left boardwalk, as the audience catches glimpses of him through the drapes before he is fully visible. His appearance startles Mary Anne, and when she opens her eyes, she sees that the “creature” has turned into a priest. As The Young Priest exits back through the drapes, Mary Anne sings a few bars from *Monsieur La Curé*, before exiting stage right.



Fig. 4. *Tableau 1: The Banks of the Stream*. The University of Lethbridge, March, 2012.

(photo: David Barrus)

Tableau 2 begins with Mary Louise entering through the drapes with her basket of sheets as a drape flies up, creating a doorway in the village square. A warm light reveals the Young Priest in this doorway, he begins describing a panel of the fresco as Mary Louise sits on the downstage edge of the cross and begins to read the sheets of the guests at the inn. Each sheet is read at a different physical height; the first on her lap, the second at shoulder height, the third and final, the sheet of the Young Priest is read standing up. She exits stage right, with her basket of sheets, still clutching the final sheet as the drapes fly up around the Young Priest and a ticking clock sound cue fades in.



Fig. 5. *Tableau 2: The Village Square*. The University of Lethbridge, March 2012.

(photo: David Barrus)

This ticking clock turns into the screams of agony of a man that fades out as the Doctor rolls in a table covered in bloody packages from stage left in Tableau 3 to create the Doctor's house. The ticking clock resumes and underscores the remainder of the scene, as the Doctor, brandishing a bone saw and an amputated hand surprises The Young Priest and offers him a seat and a drink. This intimate scene is played around the table. The Doctor manhandles the Young Priest and plies him with alcohol, until Mary of the Secrets enters from a hidden doorway at the extreme upstage of the cross boardwalk, backlit with a bright yellow light to keep her in the shadows and create an air of eerie mystery around her that remains until she exits, closing the door behind her.



Fig. 6. *Tableau 3: Mary of the Secrets enters The Doctor's House.* The University of Lethbridge, March 2012. (photo: David Barrus)

Tableau 4, *The Field of Secrets*, is lit with long shadows, dark blue and purple light highlighting the creases in the floor shroud, as a trap opens and the fabric sags as fans kick in and begin blowing the drapes that have flown to a high trim above the stage creating an eerie visual with bizarre reverberated high pitched noises and whispers emerging from the speakers hidden throughout the theatre. *Mary of the Secrets* enters from the darkness upstage, crossing to the field on the stage right platform; in a ritual, she first kisses the spot where her brother's secret is buried, then kneels beside the furrow of earth, parts the fabric in the trap, buries her head inside and begins vomiting her litany into the earth. The Young Priest emerges from the darkness stage left, never stepping into the "field" of the stage right platform itself. His scene with Mary Anne is played on

the extreme downstage of the cross and the stage left platform to give as much distance as possible between them and the “field.”



Fig. 7. *Tableau 4: The Field of Secrets*. The University of Lethbridge, March 2012.

(photo: David Barrus)

The whispers from the Field of Secrets fade out as Mary of the Secrets ends her litany and exits; a star drop begins to glow creating the nighttime of Tableau 5. Mary Louise and Mary Frances rush onto the boardwalk, Mary Louise clutching a sheet. They sit together and the secrets held in the sheet are released as Mary Louise and Mary Frances begin smelling and examining the creases and smells left behind by the mysterious new guest. Mary Anne enters from the boardwalk on stage left, lit from behind in a warm light, and the three girls giddily fantasize about becoming the model for the mysterious painter, as their action pulls them downstage. A stranger, presumably the

painter, enters stage right on the boardwalk, whistling an Italian ditty, he charmingly and elegantly takes his time to pass by the girls, leaving them swooning. Remembering the sheet, Mary Frances grabs it, tosses it behind her head and runs away claiming that she will use Mary Louise's sheet to make her Madonna's veil. Mary Louise chases after Mary Frances, the sheet trailing behind her as Mary Anne is left alone on stage, and in a moment of solitude she reprises her folk song.



Fig. 8. *Tableau 5*. The University of Lethbridge, March 2012. (photo: David Barrus)

Interrupting this moment, Mary Frances and Mary Louise begin setting up chairs for the audition in *Tableau 6*. As all three girls exit, the Painter enters with his stool and observes the perfect place to watch the auditions, opposite the chairs placed on stage left, creating an audience in front of the extreme downstage of the cross, which becomes the stage. The Doctor enters from upstage with a fresh heart wrapped in butcher's paper. As

the Painter unwraps the package and the Doctor launches into his monologue of his search for the soul, the three girls (dressed in shawls and hats) enter with baskets of flowers and a lantern to set up the village square for the audition. They sing a haunting French-Canadian folk song in a round to underscore and contrast the grotesque nature of the monologue. This underscoring happens three times throughout his speech at pivotal moments, culminating in the moment when he describes withdrawing from the cadaver of a nun after ejaculating her resurrection, standing at the extreme downstage of the stage left platform, scalpel in the air; multiple layers create an aesthetic object of ugly beauty in this moment. The girls are gathered behind the “stage” as the Young Priest enters on the cross boardwalk. Mary Frances leaves to fashion her veil. The Doctor and the Young Priest, after a scuffle, sit and the auditions begin. Mary Louise first on the stage, strikes a pose vaguely reminiscent of a Madonna statue but much more awkward, delivering her own speech at a feverish pitch. The Doctor storms the stage, dismissing Mary Louise. As he sits back down and Mary Louise flees, the Young Priest introduces Mary Anne, to whom he has taught “The Song of Solomon”, which she proceeds to stammer through until she too is dismissed by the Doctor. Mary Frances enters, dressed in a Madonna’s veil and strikes a seductive pose on her knees then begins her seduction of The Painter, only to be interrupted when Mary of the Secrets appears in the shadows on the upstage of the cross. The Painter coaxes her out of the shadows and into the light, a halo of light begins to intensify behind her until she is dressed in the veil by the Young Priest and becomes the chosen model complete with this halo reminiscent of religious paintings. In a fit of fury, Mary Frances storms the stage, rips the veil from her head, throwing it at the Young Priest on her way out. Mary of the Secrets becomes the chosen model, she is led

off the stage by The Painter who positions her into her virginal pose complete with veil as The Young Priest leaves and The Doctor reaffirms with the artist that as the patron he chooses the face in the fresco.



Fig 9. *Tableau 6: The Audition*. The University of Lethbridge, March 2012. (photo: David Barrus)

The Painter begins sketching Mary of the Secrets as Mary Louise enters in Tableau 7 with her basket of sheets. She reads the Painter's sheet sitting on the downstage portion of the cross, describing how the creases have changed as he has fallen in love. She watches him sketch and flirt with Mary of the Secrets. As the pair exit and he kisses her hand and leads her away, Mary Louise collects her sheets as the drapes fly in to create the banks of the stream. She exits through the drapes singing her lullaby folk song.



Fig. 10. *Tableau 7*. The University of Lethbridge, March 2012. (photo: David Barrus)

Mary Anne emerges from the drapes that create the forest, in pursuit of the “creature.” Mary Frances emerges as well, with a blood stained collar after sharing a moment of bliss with a dying soldier. She dismisses Mary Anne and flees. Mary Anne, feverish, collapses to her knees in front of the drapes questioning God about her sacrifice. She is stumbled upon by the Young Priest, who enters from the darkness upstage and slowly becomes illuminated as he moves downstage. Overcome by sickness and confused by this “creature” in the shape of a handsome priest, she falls into his lap in a moment reminiscent of *La Piéta*. He comes close to materializing his manly desires, only to be interrupted by Mary of the Secrets, emerging from the forest dressed in a white robe, belted by a gold cord dragging a long blue veil behind her. She sits on the edge of the boardwalk and pleads to no longer be the model. As Mary Anne regains consciousness,

she is face to face with Mary of the Secrets. Thinking she is about to die she asks if its time for her to reveal her secrets. Upset by this possibility, the Young Priest commands Mary of the Secrets to do everything asked of her by the Painter, everything. The Painter emerges from the forest and the Young Priest helps Mary Anne to her feet and escorts her away, leaving Mary of the Secrets alone with the Painter. He begins his carefully practiced seduction, spreading her veil out on the ground he invites her to join him and let go of the secrets she has been holding onto. In a moment of true release, she leans into him and spews forth the secrets she has kept for so long. Enamored and delighted he kisses her for the first time. The wind blows and the whispers begin to trickle in through the hidden speakers as he leads her away hand in hand through the forest. Mary Louise enters at the same time from stage right. Finding the abandoned sketchbook, she flips through it then rushes to the abandoned veil. Examining the creases left behind by the lovers, she proclaims a gory fate. As she rushes off, the drapes begin to fly out to create the Doctor's house.



Fig. 11. *Tableau 8*. The University of Lethbridge, March 2012. (photo: David Barrus)

Tableau 9 begins with the Young Priest and the Doctor both seated at the table as the Young Priest describes the fresco to the patron. After several glasses of liquor consumed rather rapidly and poured by the Young Priest himself in this fast paced scene, The Young Priest reveals that the face has not yet been painted and the Doctor reveals that Mary of the Secrets is pregnant. The Young Priest flees the Doctor's house just as the Doctor, scalpel in hand, prepares to strike. Watching his prey escape, he downs the Young Priest's unfinished shot and throws the empty chair with a slash of his scalpel.



Fig. 12. *Tableau 9*. The University of Lethbridge, March 2012 (photo: David Barrus)

Tableau 10 begins with the drapes flying in to create the village square, with the three downstage drapes once again creating a doorway in which Mary of the Secrets and the Painter stand. They watch Mary Frances, supported by Mary Anne and Mary Louise, as she coughs and slowly stumbles her way across stage, sitting at the base of the cross, calling on Mary of the Secrets to hear her confession. Mary of the Secrets crosses downstage to sit on the platform beside Mary Frances, leaving the Painter alone in the doorway holding a covered up canvas. Mary Anne and Mary Louise fall back, sitting a few feet away from the confession on stage right. This staging utilizes the vastness of the open set but also draws complete focus on the scene at center stage. Mary Frances grabs on to the hands of Mary of the Secrets who pulls away, as she has lost her gift to hear the secrets of the dying. In an emotionally delivered monologue, Mary Frances confesses to

finding love on the bank of the stream with a dying English soldier. She kissed him even though she knew he was coughing blood, accepting her fate just for the experience of one more kiss. With a final scream of pain she falls backwards. Mary of the Secrets quickly pulls away and exits, pushing past the Painter while Mary Anne and Mary Louise come to the side of their friend lying on the ground as she takes her few final breaths. The wind blows hard, the Doctor enters from the darkness upstage to certify the death. Standing over the body, he snaps his fingers and Mary Anne moves to the drapes at stage left, grabbing onto the closest drape, and with a quick pull, the rigging lets loose and thirty feet of canvas crash to the ground as the remaining four drapes quickly fly up and out of sight. The Doctor and Mary Anne cover the body in the fabric, pick Mary Frances up and carry her off stage right. The cascades of fabric roll over the lap of Mary Louise as she begins her monologue of lament. On a bare stage, alone with the Painter, she sings a few bars of her haunting lullaby at an eerily slow tempo as she disappears into the darkness upstage. The Doctor re-enters to collect his bag, which he left behind to remove the body, and the Painter reveals the canvas to him, on which is painted the face of the Young Priest in the place of the Virgin Mary's face. The Doctor snatches the painting, marveling at its beauty then passes it back to the Painter along with his salary of jewelry and coins and moves to exit only to be stopped by the Painter. He laments as to how Mary of the Secrets was different, but by showing her the light, she became like every other girl, monotonous. The Doctor leaves him alone on stage with his painting.



Fig. 13. *Tableau 10: Mary Frances' body wrapped in drape.* The University of Lethbridge, March 2012. (photo: David Barrus)

Tableau 11 begins with the wind from the previous scene fading into a sacred music cue as the black faux wall upstage slowly flies out to reveal the cross cutout glowing a brilliant white. Mary Anne and the Young Priest enter from opposite sides of the boardwalk, the light illuminating only the cross of the intersecting boardwalks. They meet at the center of the cross, he is carrying a flagellator in his outstretched hand and thrusts it at her. She takes it and he walks forward on the cross, unbuttoning his cassock to the waist. He pulls the cassock down to his hips, exposing his naked torso and they both do the sign of the cross. The Young Priest drops to his knees at the downstage of the cross clutching a red rosary and Mary Anne, standing upstage of him, begins the flagellation. In a moment of sacrifice, they both get lost in the pain and pleasure as they

each experience a moment of sexual awakening for the first time. With each hit of the whip the Young Priest's cries grow more sexual and Mary Anne begins to unbutton her blouse. A red special illuminating the Young Priest builds in intensity with each hit of the whip as a red special illuminates and then fades on Mary Anne, again building in intensity. When he can take no more, he collapses to the ground with a cry of pain as the red lights fade; Mary Anne stands behind him, blouse open ready for her sacrifice. The Young Priest makes his way to his feet and pulls the cassock up over his shoulders as Mary Anne comes up behind him, pushes the whip into his hands and drops to her knees, her blouse falling from her shoulders; bare-breasted she begs for her turn to sacrifice, throwing herself at him. He leans in, asking what she wants from him, his lips close to hers. He stops himself at the last moment and demands that she leave. Mary Anne covers her breasts and runs away as The Young Priest collapses on the boardwalk. The Doctor, having heard the cries of pain, enters brandishing morphine from the opposite side of the boardwalk. The Doctor, pulling down the cassock of the Young Priest, examines his wounds and prepares the morphine while staring at the exposed flesh. The Young Priest laments as to how his plan has failed. The Doctor injects him with a vial of morphine and positions him on the ground, bare chested and with arms outstretched on the cross of the intersecting boardwalks, resembling a Christ-like crucifixion pose. The Doctor describes his plan to find the soul by removing the face of the Young Priest. Caressing the exposed flesh of his victim, he undresses slowly and methodically just as he described in his monologue in Tableau 6, this time with The Young Priest rather than the cadaver of a nun. The last moment of the tableau is The Doctor, standing naked above the helpless exposed body of the Young Priest. With scalpel raised in the air against the glowing

white of the cross, lights sculpt every muscle and gleam off the blade of his knife as the scene slowly fades to black.



Fig. 14. *Tableau 11: The Flagellation*. And Fig. 15. *Tableau 11: The Mutilation*. The University of Lethbridge, March 2012. (photo David Barrus)

The wind blows hard as the Painter, carrying the canvas, enters in Tableau 12. The darkness of the previous scene lifts and reveals a shadowy and dark space. From offstage the voice of Mary of the Secrets pierces the space as she enters, dressed in a white floral blouse just like the rest of the village girls. Pregnant and holding a bouquet of daisies, she confesses her love to him as he sits on the boardwalk. She kisses him and describes what their lives will be like with their child. He reveals the face of the painting to her. She is astonished and confronts him. He reverts back to speaking in Italian, which she does not understand. She grabs him, banging on his chest, begging him not to go. He throws her to the floor and she clutches her stomach, letting out a prolonged scream that gives way to a sinister laugh as the lights shift to long shadows and near darkness. The whispers from the Field of Secrets flood the speakers and the eerie Mary of the Secrets sound cue gives way to loud church bells announcing the armistice. She exits promising to abort her child.

The bells transition into the Epilogue as the Young Priest enters, face bandaged, and drops to his knees in prayer at the intersection of the cross boardwalk. Mary Anne emerges from the darkness behind him. Kneeling beside him she tells the Young Priest to tell her what he sees. She moves to the cross cutout which has now become the doors to the church. She struggles to close it as the Young Priest removes the bandages from his face and begins to “see.” Mary Anne, scared, drops to her knees on the boardwalk and

closes her eyes once more. Mary of the Secrets ascends stairs hidden under the set and emerges from a slit in the fabric in the orchestra pit dressed as a bride. She moves to stand in front of the Young Priest at the downstage edge of the cross boardwalk. She crouches down and picks up the bouquet of daises she left behind in the previous scene. Holding these daises she moves across the stage over the boardwalk, as the Young Priest describes his vision, recreated onstage. Mary of the Secrets moves over the boardwalk and her flowers brush against a frightened Mary Anne. Her long white veil is stained red and trails behind her as she exits through the cross cutout. The Young Priest begins to undo his cassock in this moment of ascension his hands explore his naked chest. Each line is delivered with a sexual edge which Mary Anne echoes. He plunges his hands down his cassock and reaching the point of climax, the ascension is complete. He falls to the floor, the long veil disappearing through the cross cutout long after Mary of the Secrets has exited. The Young Priest affixes his bandages as Mary Anne moves toward him, describing the fresco. As she describes the face in the triptych, she kneels beside him, the lights fade and the music fades out completely. She tells him that it is his face in the painting of the Virgin Mary. All the lights fade to a bright white special illuminating only his face with no soundscape. The light stays on his face for a prolonged period as the audience takes in this final moment, a striking image. No sound cue signals the end of the show, the special on his face fades slowly on a quiet stage.



Fig. 16. *The Epilogue: The Young Priest's Vision*. The University of Lethbridge, March 2012. (photo: David Barrus)

CHAPTER EIGHT

Final Reflections

I left the theatre on opening night remembering the images and moments: Mary of the Secrets emerging from the fabric below the stage dressed as a bride with a long veil stained red flowing behind her with the cross glowing blood red; the grand reveal of the cross cutout blazing white amidst a wash of religious music, the Doctor standing naked over the inert body of the Young Priest scalpel in the air as the lights fade; Mary Anne pulling down a thirty foot drape from high above the stage and wrapping Mary Frances' body in it; or The Young Priest on his knees with cassock around his hips as Mary Anne whips his naked torso in an act of religious sacrifice that turns to a sexual awakening. My task of attempting to realize Bouchard's wish to present memorable ideas, images and sentences was successful.

Less successful was my task of achieving truthful performances within this theatrical production. While the cast did have a strong connection as a cohesive and committed ensemble, there were some weaker players and moments. Having said that, I don't think the weaker actors and moments were as noticeable to the audience as they were to me because I had such strong ideas and high expectations for the entire show. More than what was lacking, what stood out was what really worked. The strong ensemble work in the audition scene of Tableau 6; Makambe's emotionally charged monologue in Tableau 10 as Mary Frances confronts her death; Erica, Cole and Ryan's brave and beautiful work in the flagellation and mutilation in Tableau 11; and Makambe

and Erica's fun and playful village girls on the banks of the stream watching a naked man bathe in Tableau 1.

Despite my disappointment with the costumes, they did not detract from the production. In fact all of the design elements worked together to support my vision of creating a beautiful and theatrical production full of clever choices that built meaning into the work. There were moments of beauty and theatricality achieved through design, the reveal of the cross for example which was a stunning moment for the audience. But also one that reminds them that they are in a theatre as they watch the black curtains rise. This also adds meaning to the work; in this case the image of the cross exists as a luminous presence that consumes the entire width of the stage. This places the action clearly within the physical setting of the church and within the broader context as a visual representation of the presence and importance of the church in the world of the play.

Reflecting on my work, I believe that I was able to conquer the challenges presented in Bouchard's script. In doing so, I was able to further my development as a director, one who not only functions as the guide to presenting the play to the audience, but also as an artist who creates an artistic vision for a production that is remembered as much for its visual elements, stage pictures and theatricality as it is for its characters and story. My task as I move ahead is to continue to hone and develop my craft on shows where perhaps I don't have the same immediate passion as I did for *The Madonna Painter*, and on which certainly, I will not be working on for well over a year. My long-term goal is to truly become an artist-director, an auteur in a way, where my productions

are remembered for the aesthetic style that I have stamped on it as the director. Working on Bouchard's play for the last significant period of both my degree and my life has been a true joy. While it was an experience that was full of challenges, it has been incredibly rewarding and inspiring. *The Madonna Painter* has identified my strengths and weaknesses as a director, and I have striven to build on these strengths and conquer these weaknesses, and as I move forward from this experience, I hope to continue to do so. Moving into this project I knew that I worked well with actors and wanted to continue my work as an acting coach. My biggest challenge as director was blocking, it has always been a critique of my teachers and supervisors. This show needed solid blocking, especially with the lack of furniture and multiple scene changes. I also wanted to build upon my ability to create stage pictures and tell the story through these pictures. I believe that my work with actors was not as strong on this show, partly I think this was do the very challenging nature of the script and the characters, written for actors much more experienced than students. The blocking was strong, simple, and effective. My biggest success with *The Madonna Painter* as a director was the use of storytelling through images. I worked meticulously to craft careful images that not only told the story, but that enhanced it. Moving forward to my next project, I want to continue to develop my work with actors, my use of imagistic storytelling, and to not let design elements that I am unhappy with continue. My work on this show has solidified my belief that I have the skills, vision and drive necessary to succeed, and for this I am truly grateful.

It is through my process with *The Madonna Painter* that I have been able to let go and take a few steps back from my work and see it for all its flaws as well as its

successes. In the business of creating art, it is easy to be precious about your own work, and to not value constructive criticism or outside opinions. I have witnessed this first hand in myself and other theatre artists. However, through this process I have made the discovery that you cannot learn or move forward in creating art until you allow your creations to be evaluated, critiqued, talked about, and even disliked. This is not an easy discovery to come to, but I know that it will not only allow me to better myself as a theatre artist, it will also allow my art to grow in new ways because of the thoughts, opinions, and critiques of other inspiring theatre artists and educators.

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APPENDIX

Transcribed Interview

MICHEL MARC BOUCHARD INTERVIEW – October 21, 2011

I was lucky enough to be able to connect with award winning playwright Michel Marc Bouchard via Skype to discuss my upcoming production of his play, *The Madonna Painter* that will serve as my thesis project. I have attempted to re-produce this interview as close as possible to the actual conversation, but I have taken a few liberties to adjust some language to better communicate Bouchard's meaning because of the barrier presented by language and his accent, adjusting only slightly to make better grammatical sense for the reader.

SG: I'm just going to start with the questions, so feel free to give as much as you feel. So, firstly, why does the French version include the deformed angel character?

MMB: Uh because you know it was because you know the language was not the reason why I made those changes ok. It was just you know in the process of just rewriting the play. I don't know if you know we have already the first version in Italian and after that the version in Montreal in French. And when we started the process of translation I was not happy about the two first versions, in terms- of there was too much impressionism for me. I would like to go to return to the story tale and that is why you know I put in the center of this journey The Young Priest instead of the angel, because the angel with The Young Priest became too much fear. And that is why I decided to cut it, it was a beautiful character, a really really really theatrical character but I decided you know because it was not the same style, the same approach for the last version. Yeah, it's kind of a really strange process I have with this play, really unusual too. It's a little bit crazy but...

SG: Right, I was just really interested as to why that character wasn't in there, but that makes a lot of sense to me. I was just curious, because I think it's a very beautiful character.

MMB: In terms of theatricality we lost some, but you know for the priest it was better, because you know he is the guide of this journey.

SG: Right. So you were more focused on the story and the characters than the theatricality of the play?

MMB: Yeah, yeah and in the same way I kept the impressionist thing of this show but more in the backdrop, sorry the background, not in the front. As it was before, especially

in Italia, you know in Italia there was no story just you know element of the painting. But Europeans now, they like that kind of thing, but is not the same for us as American.

SG: I know that you re-wrote the play when translating it, so my question is why did you decide to do that?

MMB: As I said you know just a few minutes ago I wasn't satisfied about the thing. And you know I came from story, I don't come from the constructive thing. And I said to myself, the audience have to be involved with this play. The audience has to be a part as I said of this journey, of this exploration and that The Young Priest have to make and that is why I decided to make a new version, and each time, revisiting a play after it has received a production already of this first material, it's a treat. It's a treat. For sure, for the editor it's terrible because they say, "Hey which version now? Which is the official one?"

But for people such as you working in a University it's a treat.

SG: So you just wanted to change the theatricality and focus on the story?

MMB: Yeah, more of the story and create more links between the character and the plot.

SG: I also, read, and I saw the video on your website of you guiding a tour of the church, so I am curious what made it from your childhood into this play.

MMB: Um, I think it was a, um you know I don't mean the play is about it, but I started a fixation about a painting in my church in my hometown. Because it was kind of the first time you know as many local guys, country guys, we are in front of a piece of art that means something, its not a representation of our, you know the thing we see outside, the thing we see at home its suddenly this virgin and those angels and a painting created by a stranger, an Italian, that's been almost the hand of God, because you know God came from Italia. It was you know to me, I was amazed by this piece of art because it was my first connection with art and that's what I would like to make someday something about this painting. And this painter you know he had his own rumor and gossip in our town when he came. He was kind of a really seducer and a lot of young women were in love with him, he spent maybe a year and a half; his name, first name was Gaetano, Gaetano the Italian. And I wanted to put Gaetano as the name of the painter but the Italians you know they said, " So gross. We can't fall in love with a guy named Gaetano," and that is why it became Alessandro. And so much gossip around that and so, I was fascinated by this kind of power, this divine power we give to an artist, especially an artist of God. The confusion between sexuality and redemption and all those young girls, especially in the play, who were totally fascinated by him; but by the man, by the curves of this man's body and the body of this man and the musicality of this language, the Italian language and yeah that's where I based the story in my hometown, but it's not, as I say in the advertising in the beginning of the book, it's not a portrait of my hometown.

SG: My other question is what do you want the audience to think when they leave the theatre?

MMB: I don't know. I really don't know. I hope they receive some impressions. They receive a print and for sure in their own mind it's a big questioning about fate and science and otherwise, especially in this place- science and religion are something that are not in the head of the women in this time period they were in the head of the men but it is such a power that we tried to communicate it. I hope that people leaving the theatre have another point of view of the religion and the spirituality and my point of view and that makes a great story if we are not in the book if we just you know work on what those kinds of things, powerful and immaterial things create in our own life. Yeah, especially the deviant thing, not necessarily the good thing.

SG: I am also curious, what is it about the pursuit of beauty that you find so appealing, I find it in *Lilies* and in *Heatwave* as well, so is that something that you are really interested in, or does it just keep coming up?

MMB: It's a fascination. I'm really really fascinated by beauty, the beauty of the arts, beauty of the body, beauty of men I must say it has a presence in my work and not just the body but the soul too; the determination, the power of men. It's a beauty itself. Yeah, looking for beauty because I think I am not born in the beauty side of the world, I must say, where I came from beauty was not, there was no categorization for beauty. I know I was Catholic but it was almost Calvinist in a way, I said the difference with the French Catholic and the Catholic from Italia is we are more Protestant, almost more Calvinist than we are Roman Catholic. And beauty was not present, in the men it was absent and we had to discover it. So I think this is why I am still so fascinated with beauty of things. And I think in our world now it is really really essential, because everything happens in our world now, on this planet, looking for, this searching for beauty, it's an important role.

SG: Right, and I think that the thing that is really beautiful about your work is that is about the beauty of a person, not just the cosmetic beauty, and that is what the world is concerned with now.

MMB: Yeah yeah.

SG: I have also noticed your use of the element of threes, you have three Mary's--

MMB: Yeah yeah, I was surprised by your questions, but you have to think, to see the three girls more as muses, more as chorus more as a...it's not the same thing in *Down Dangerous Passes Road*, you have the same thing another chorus, it is a chorus in *Coronation Voyage*, but I don't mean that by purpose as I said and that is why your question amazed me, in a good way. But I said no, because in *Down Dangerous Passes Road* they are the meaning, the three boys are all the meaning of the play. That is not the question. For sure the way that I wrote that kind of chorus, not, it is a bit in *Coronation Voyage*, but the others, *Down Dangerous Passes Road* and *The Madonna Painter* they

are more archetypal, more grouped together, three different ways to see something. But from my point of view you have to add to this chorus Mary of the Secrets, another Mary. But she is not together with the other one. That is what I have to say about chorus, it is not by purpose.

SG: So you see it more as these three girls function more as a chorus than?

MMB: Yes, I mean chorus, but that's not a good word, I mean the function of chorus as a group as you know a sister a muse.

SG: One question that I do have specifically about *The Madonna Painter* is how important is the specific time and era? I know the events that happen are time specific, but do you see it as more timeless?

MMB: I think so. It's interesting because when we make the first production of the show at Montreal, the premiere. It was really...the lighting, the costume was more, I'd say 16th Century than now, than during the flu, the Spanish flu. So I mean this idea to leave more of a print, an anecdotal thing because it is not a play about the Spanish Flu, it's not just so period; as the painting of the virgin in my hometown, we cannot understand the period. But it was the fact of many painters, they put so much anachronism in their painting with the subject that it's, you know it's timeless. It's fluid.

SG: As a writer and an artist, what would you say impacts you more, the character, the story or the theme?

MMB: I don't know. I don't know. I could talk about the thing I work; the thing I'm really concerned about is the story, the story tale. Yeah it's really important to me and I work a lot from structure and about the way it's formed. The character, it is really easy for me. I must say you know it's no problem to write a character and I'm pretty sure I put in my garbage so many characters who are fabulous. But character is not necessarily; the story and what I want to say is to introduce to the public, it is the most difficult thing for me. Because you know I'm really intuitive, I'm working about fixation, fantasm, I don't start with a character, if I have a character I don't write the play. It's kinda pas de voyage it's really, you know I know how its finished, I know the crisis I know so why write, it's a bit boring to put words in this character, so that is why you know with this fixation I need some time to discover the theme, the subject of the play during writing it. For sure, you know I have the luxury of my time and the time to do that to immerse myself and come back. I find that in a way from now, what I like is to create, to find lots of layers for the story.

SG: That's great.

MMB: I think that the most impact I have is on deviance, and I must say to the theatre business is my story. Because with a story, a good story, I don't mean by that all my stories are good, but you know with a story a director could reinvent it, the work.

Because you know he has the story so he could be minimalist, naturalistic, could be just symbolism. But if you get the story you can do a lot of things.

SG: Right. So *The Madonna Painter* is about that story, you said that when you re-wrote it you really wanted to focus on the story; that is paramount.

MMB: Because in the story could have so much room for the director, it's not the same in movies you have to put everything, everything. What I like in theatre is that there is room for the director. Especially in *The Madonna Painter*.

SG: Perfect, now I am coming to Quebec next month to do a bit of research and get some experience. So what do I need to experience for this play?

MMB: I was thinking about your question. You have to go to Quebec City, if you could, and you have to visit, The Nun Museum in Quebec City... and you will understand for sure the nostalgia of this period. Go to museums, that's what I suggest. If you go to Quebec City, go to The Museum of Civilization, it's downtown Quebec City, it's a big museum and visit the exposition about the history of Quebec and especially all of the church things, it's really really fascinating. And in Quebec City we have a lot of museums for nuns, you will be an expert, you will become an expert on that. And I hope, also, you will have a nun to make the visit with you, because if you have a nun it is a great thing; feel the admiration and the love, the nostalgia and the company of the church, it's very interesting.

SG: My last question is how should the audience feel about, or me as the director feel about the combination of sex beauty and religion?

MMB: For sure, in a play such as *The Madonna Painter*, the audience looks too often for my point of view for one thing, and you will see audiences who have too many things in front of them have problems because the road is more complex than they expected. I hope that they are leaving with a print, a picture, an idea, a sentence, something like that. But they can't hold all the play. It's impossible and you have to direct the story the best you can, be logical; to the actors, where are we on this journey, very clear about all the questions of the story. For sure, an audience in front of that, it's "oh my God" and that's the experience, that makes the beauty of the thing, it's not one thing. I hope they appreciate this freedom to explore in another point of view of our religious culture. Because it's a primary self. That's what I hope. But for sure, don't expect a consensual welcome. It doesn't work. A few of my plays have a very consensual welcome, but this play it has an aesthetic object, so enjoy it. Enjoy it. And nothing is in the middle. In the passion, it has to be Latin, and I think you understand what I mean, more than Anglophone, they have to show the excitement, the passion, the love, yeah, sexuality, everything.

When do you start rehearsals?

SG: Next semester, in January.

MMB: And it's at the University.

SG: Yeah, at the University in March.

MMB: And you have a good cast?

SG: I don't know, I don't audition until December.

MMB: You audition the students?

SG: yeah, there are two plays next semester, *Hamlet* and *The Madonna Painter*. So the students choose what they audition for.

MMB: (LAUGHS)