ABSTRACT

The plays of Beverley Rosen Simons, written over the past thirty years, have had a contentious and underprivileged relationship with Canada's professional theatre companies. Her most famous work, Crabdance, was, however, included in a 2001 anthology of British Columbian plays, bringing Simons' text into the contemporary landscape of Canadian drama. Although the anthology printed her most well-known play, it was written in 1969. Today, she has many scripts that are ready, and have been ready, to be brought to the stage, but they remain unproduced. In 1994, the late Urjo Kareda, Artistic Director of the Tarragon Theatre, cited a specific reason as to why he was unable to support a production of Simons' latest play, now you see it.... The charge levied against the text is that Simons' "technique of simultaneous scenes...exists only in her own imagination...placing iron clamps around the creativity of both the actors and the director," and thus this play is virtually impossible to produce.

The purpose of this thesis is to offer a rediscovery of Simons' work, placing her in the context of Canadian theatre history and providing a brief background on some of her earlier texts. I then provide a comprehensive dramaturgical analysis of her newest unproduced and unpublished play, now you see it.... Since I am preparing this play for production, I will specifically examine the charge laid by Kareda. He was a champion of new Canadian work and a major theatrical force in Canada before his years at Tarragon and beyond. This analysis is specifically geared towards the question of whether or not Simons' challenging dramaturgy, in terms of content and form, is truly too difficult to produce.
Through a detailed dramaturgical analysis of the text including characters, setting and synopsis, an examination of thematic devices that Simons employs, and a discussion of the staging issues that arose in a pre-production workshop of the text, I hope to illuminate some of the complexities surrounding the production of this play.
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I. INTRODUCTION

(Re)Discovering Simons

"As soon as I seen [her] I knew what [she] was" (Simons, The Theft 1)

I first encountered the work of Beverley Rosen Simons by chance. When her name and the play title, Crabdance, came up in conversation, I knew that I had seen them before. I rediscovered her text in my copy of Playing the Pacific Province: An Anthology of British Columbia Plays, 1967 – 2000, edited by Ginny Ratsoy and James Hoffman. I found Crabdance disturbing and frightening, and initially, I did not understand it at all. However, I was intrigued by the introductory essay on Simons provided by Hoffman. Hoffman positions Simons as an underrated, post-colonial, feminist author, whose work is intrinsically linked to British Columbia. Ratsoy and Hoffman contend that through their anthology they are “canon-making”; specifically including writers that “have been instrumental in their impact on British Columbia theatre” (iii). Simons’ inclusion in this anthology gives credence to the assertion that she is a playwright of value and that her works are “very powerful and effective dramatization[s]” (50). Yet, aside from that one chance conversation, I had never heard of her outside of the context of this anthology.

Hoffman’s essay led me to the Winter 1976 volume of Canadian Theatre Review (CTR), which was the first issue of CTR ever devoted to a single playwright. That writer was Simons. In the journal, essays about Simons are written by some of Canada’s most recognized theatre practitioners of that time including Don Rubin, Malcolm Black and Peter Hay. The essays act as a combination of assistance, trying to rectify the under-
acknowledgement of her talent, and justification of why her plays ought to be produced. This volume also includes publication of her most recent work at the time, *Leela Means To Play*. Again, I found her text disturbing, frightening and so intellectually and theatrically stimulating that I could not grasp the entirety of the play in one reading.

The passionate support of Simons in *CTR* increased my interest in this seemingly forgotten playwright, and I began to think that she would make an excellent subject for my thesis. If the author was so important to Canadian drama, as professed by *CTR*, why were her plays rarely, if ever, produced by our mainstream theatre companies? Why were her texts not being taught in university theatre classes along with George Ryga, John Herbert and Robertson Davies? Had the “mythical excuse that [...] *Crabdance*] is too difficult to produce” (Hay 7) diminished the play in the eyes of potential readers or producers? I discovered a copy of her anthology of short plays, *Preparing*, at my local second-hand bookstore. While these five one-act plays are less disturbing and easier to grasp than the two full length plays I had already read, her intellect and unique theatrical style are still explicit in them. My immediate response to these innovative and entertaining short plays was a desire to direct, produce or act in them.

I began a search for any secondary resources related to Simons and at the same time, I tried to find the playwright herself. While I was dismayed to discover that secondary sources concerning Simons and her work are limited, I was excited to learn that the playwright still resides and works in Vancouver. In the hope of meeting this seemingly reclusive playwright, I asked Talonbooks to forward my *curriculum vitae* to Simons. She
agreed to meet with me. I reread both *Crabdance* and *Leela Means To Play* in an attempt to see if I could formulate an idea for my thesis, but when Simons gave me a copy of her latest play, *now you see it...*, I knew that I had definitively found my thesis subject.

Agreeing to be the subject of my thesis, Simons allowed me access to many of her unpublished works including radio plays, stage plays, film scripts and short stories, as well as personal correspondence regarding her plays. Simons has all but withdrawn from the world of theatre. Disappointed by the lack of critical attention and professional productions of her work, and gun-shy over many unfulfilled promises, Simons appears to be particularly, and understandably, sensitive about who is given the production rights for her plays. She came to watch me portray the role of Lucy in a performance of a dark and disturbing new play by emerging author C.E. Gatchalian. His play, *Crossing*, is as challenging as the work of Simons in terms of its strict adherence to a specific rhythmic structure, and in its demand for performers who are willing to expose the most hidden and vulnerable aspects of themselves. She appreciated the fact that I can feel and interpret a play’s intrinsic rhythm, and that rather than fleeing from frightening material, I gravitate towards it. After watching this play, Simons agreed to let me direct *now you see it*....

This thesis, then, has two major purposes. The first is to offer a rediscovery of Simons’ work and to question why a playwright of such promise chose to withdraw from the theatre. The second is to provide a comprehensive dramaturgical analysis of her newest unproduced and unpublished play, *now you see it...*, as I prepare it for production, in the
hopes of garnering attention and appreciation for this challenging and dynamic script. As I see it, the major difference between a dramaturgical analysis and a purely academic approach to this thesis is that a dramaturge specifically works towards putting plays on the stage. A sound argument is the means and the end of academic inquiry, an approach which usually ends on the page. Even theatre academics do not often test their theories on the stage, while the intention of a dramaturge is to make sure that plays are ready for production. In other words, what sets my thesis apart is that it does not end with the intellectual investigation of this new play. Instead, I am readying it for its theatrical premiere.

Why Simons?

“...And we suffer...The sins of our author...Her obsessions...Dare we say, her fetishes?” (Simons, Prologue 17-18).

Those who love the work of Beverley Rosen Simons love it with a passion. Those who dislike it do so, in part, because it “challenges the status quo of Western philosophy, of Western social organization and of Western dramatic structure” (Raby 1). There is a paucity of critical material written about Simons and her work. Yet, those few critical articles strongly articulate the belief that a playwright of great skill and relevancy is being overlooked. Today, Simons concentrates on her prose fiction, having functionally withdrawn from the world of theatre. In fact, most of her plays, and the critical evaluations of them, were written well before 1990. This demonstrates the fact that Simons’ theatrical works have primarily “retreated into oblivion” (Raby 1). Her dramatic
texts, including *Crabdance*, the most famous and critically successful of her plays, have had neither significant analytical attention nor the production histories they deserve. Her work is challenging and uncompromising, delving into issues of justice and morality, perception and belief, social consciousness and private torment. The questions raised within her dramas are as complex and multifaceted as the characters that embody them. As I found, her work is not an easy read. It takes effort to understand and appreciate the symbolic and theatrical characters she creates. Simons does not offer easy answers. Through her ironic and biting wit, her keen, insightful intelligence, and her penetrating honesty, she asks us to engage with the societal issues at hand, not necessarily to solve them. For Simons, working towards answers occurs after one has left the theatre, though she does supply the tools and the incentive to change.

The first thing that drew me to Simons was her evident mastery of craft. From her earliest writing it is easy to see that Simons understands her medium. With the exception of *Crusader*, a highly stylized drama employing South Asian and Japanese conventions, and *Prologue*, a Brechtian politically-minded diatribe, Simons’ plays essentially fall within the conventions of realism. However, because she draws from a mix of so many theatrical conventions, her plays often blur the boundaries of realistic drama. While the acting style remains ‘real’, the use of the stage is far from Ibsenian. The function the plays fulfill is that of illuminating humanity. We see ourselves in her characters, from the most stylized representation to the most realistic. Simons understands how to command the stage and in her plays you can see her relishing that command. One of her known and recorded traits as an author is to create shocking twist endings that viscerally
wrench mind and soul. In her 1982 Master’s thesis, Canadian theatre practitioner and theorist Gyllian Raby explains that because Simons ends her plays with a “sudden reversal or […] a twist in perception […] it disconcerts the audience as the curtain falls. […] As a dramatic strategy, the technique is highly effective, and leaves an audience breathless” (37). Through this visceral disruption, Simons connects with the viewer in unexpected ways. She knows how to take her audience on a journey, but she leads them where they least expect to go. Rota Herzberg Lister, in “Beverley Simons and the Influence of Oriental Theatre,” believes that Simons is a playwright who “deserves our attention” (225). The fact that her plays are intrinsically ‘west coast’, although she is not even produced in her home town of Vancouver, makes her even more deserving of critical attention at the university level.

Simons’ work is intimidating in its scope of theme and presentation. Initially, I had great difficulty understanding her texts. Yet, I could feel that her work offered more than I comprehended, so I persisted with them. Her plays are painful in their illumination of humanity’s innermost secrets and fears. No wonder “many theatre people [believe] that her work is not safe to produce. The humor which mitigates the sharp, uncomfortable vision of her plays is frequently overlooked by directors and critics alike” (Raby 6). Akin to an absurdist aesthetic, in Simons’ plays despair can overwhelm the text for an unskilled reader. However, aligned again with absurdism, her plays are full of humor. It may be satirical and darkly ironic, but it is humor. Her characters may not discover how to change, but they realize that they must. If they do not reach this epiphany, Simons anticipates that the audience will. Through the playing and unexpectedly violent ripping
away of the social mask, Simons disarticulates social conformity. In showing humanity as both masked and unmasked constructions, Simons exposes the fundamental absurd truth that isolation is the primary shared human condition. Through her depiction of a myriad of social roles, we begin to understand how we mask ourselves. Often her characters are unsure who they are without the mask of conformity. Though they strive for unadulterated, honest experience, through their daily trials we see that subjective truth can never be shared. One human can never truly know another. We barely know ourselves.

**Methodology**

“And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. [...] And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.[... ] And God said...Let there be light” (Simons, *now you see it...* 6)

This thesis investigates the most recent stage play by Beverley Rosen Simons, *now you see it...*, through a dramaturgical and directorial lens. A dramaturge must be academic in approach. At the very least, s/he must have a thirst for research and discovery, an ability to organize and articulate the ideas of others, and a desire to ensure that theatre remains a vital and accessible platform for social interaction and exchange. A director makes critical judgments about characterizations, themes and meanings that then become concretized on the stage. Perhaps unconsciously, a director politicizes and personalizes any script s/he directs because, in telling the story, one must choose what is important to one’s own specific illumination of the text. With my background in acting, directing and
dramaturgy to guide my academic investigation, the goal of this critical analysis is to examine both the unique dramaturgy and the complex thematic story of *now you see it*... as I prepare this challenging script for production.

In my analysis, I will briefly review some of the critical evaluations Simons' writing has engendered thus far, and therefore contextualize her work in the realm of Canadian theatre history. Then I will illuminate specific dramaturgical and thematic elements prevalent in *now you see it*.... To this end, I have provided a dramaturgical report, similar to the feedback I give to writers who submit their scripts to the Playwrights Theatre Centre, Vancouver's primary centre for new play development. This report includes a detailed plot synopsis and any questions and / or suggestions that may arise from my reading. Finally, as I am in preparation for bringing this play to the stage as a director, I will examine the problems and questions that arose from a script workshop, arranged by my production company, Meta.for Theatre Society. Since the biggest challenge in this play is a split-stage dramaturgy, with two scenes occurring simultaneously, our objective for the workshop was to hear the script out loud in order to comprehend the complexity of rhythm and structure. Our major question was whether or not the dialogue can function in the way that Simons intends.
II. HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

In the Beginning...

“Oh John Hirsch... Oh, Canada Council... We in the land of the Lotus Eaters...... have lost our drive... Our spunk... Our sense of purpose” (Simons, 
Prologue 17)

To move forward in context, we must first look back. The object of this thesis is not to provide a biography of Simons and her early work. This was already done comprehensively by Gyllian Raby in 1982 in her Master’s thesis entitled Beverley 
Simons: A Critical Evaluation. I am more interested in the fact that in the intervening twenty-three years between Raby’s thesis and my own, Simons has not become the critically successful Canadian playwright she was perceived as, and promoted to be, in her past. Bertram Joseph, as quoted by Malcolm Black, declares in 1969 that “[i]f you don’t know [Simons’] name now, you will before long, and so will the whole world of theatre” (Black 12). So what happened? As I mentioned earlier, in the winter of 1976, the Canadian Theatre Review dedicated one of its issues to the study of a single playwright (Simons) for the first time. They also provided a full reproduction of her text 
Leela Means To Play, which was the focal point of Raby’s thesis. Despite having a professional workshop and reading at the Eugene O’Neill Theatre in Connecticut, Leela has yet to find professional production. Through the few critical sources that exist about Simons, I will briefly situate her struggle towards production in the context of Canadian theatre.
When Don Rubin, Peter Hay, Malcolm Black, Michael Sidnell and John Juliani wrote the first ever “casebook” for the Canadian Theatre Review (CTR) in 1976, they were already trying to prevent the work of Beverley Simons from becoming a forgotten footnote in the annals of Canadian theatre history. Despite the fact that Simons was at the height of her publicly lauded playwriting career, the editors and contributors of this journal already acknowledged that she was “Canada’s most ignored, important writer” (Rubin, A Simons’ Casebook 4). Feeling passionately that her “dramatic work demands to be taken seriously and, even more, deserves to be taken seriously” (4), this group of artistic directors, academics and critics strove to place Simons in the consciousness of a theatrical scene which produced “lesser and less-difficult writers [...] season after season” (4) while Simons remained (and remains) “basically unproduced by Canada’s professional theatre companies” (4). In the hopes of rectifying this gross injustice, the CTR casebook included publication of her script Leela Means To Play, while acknowledging that “[t]hose who found Crabdance difficult to come to grips with will probably find Leela virtually impossible” (4). Although it has found critical attention as text, this play still awaits its first full production.

In 1982, as a graduate student at the University of Calgary, Gyllian Raby wrote Beverley Simons: A Critical Evaluation. Her thesis offers a “thorough critical appreciation of Simons’ plays [that had] been lacking” (Raby 1). While the CTR casebook positions Simons as an overlooked talent, Raby succeeds in her goal of rectifying this neglect by providing a comprehensive “biographical and bibliographical” analysis of all of Simons’ plays up to and including Leela Means To Play. Written through a feminist framework of
analysis, Raby’s thesis also questions “the reasons behind the extraordinary and sporadic stage histories” (2) of Simons’ plays and concludes that Simons’ plays “are neglected by theatre critics and practitioners in Canada because they extend beyond the domain of traditional criticism and common commercial practice” (Abstract).

In the twenty-three years since Raby’s thesis, very little critical work has been written about Simons and, other than Crabdance and selected shorter works, her stage plays have still not found professional avenues of production. Simons is a prolific writer who has “written enough plays to fill four or five evenings of theatre as well as three full-length original screenplays, [and] uncounted numbers of stories and television plays” (Hay 7). Simons is once again armed with an intelligent though challenging new script in now you see it.... However, she continues to struggle to have her work produced by the major Canadian companies. Time and again Simons has been told that her textual and thematic dramaturgy is too difficult to produce. While I believe this to be patently incorrect, her work does make people think; it is not easy. One must indeed grapple with both her dramatic structure and her disturbingly raw themes. However, if theatre is about thought and transformation, her scripts hold the power to induce both.

There is no question that Simons’ work is challenging both thematically and dramaturgically. The question is why this induces producers to turn down the opportunity to work on her plays rather than bring them to the stage. Her unyielding, frightening illumination of truth and her painful honesty are perhaps clues as to why people prefer not to produce her work. Theatre has many innate challenges from
obtaining funding to attracting an audience. For many producers, the idea of starting with a play that is already deemed "too difficult" (Hay 7) is like going into a theatrical venture knowing for certain that there is no money to be made. Yet, I cannot help but think that in their dismissal of her work, these producers overlook her humor and poignancy. The further I got into researching Simons' career, the more intrigued I became by the paradoxical acclaim of Crabdance compared with the limited and/or non-existent productions of her later work. While John Juliani and others were clearly proponents of her work, producing and directing many of her shorter plays, her two most challenging and thought provoking full-length plays, Leela Means To Play and now you see it..., have yet to be mounted in production. Although her work is extremely complex, relevant and dynamic, it seems she has indeed become the lost footnote in the landscape of Canadian drama, which the CTR tried to prevent all those years ago.

I Remember Beverley...Or, Who is Beverley Rosen Simons?

"Everyone knows...a play a year or the playwright disappears...Sinks...Out of sight...Out of mind...The public consciousness...So she doesn't exist? Only a shadow..." (Simons, Prologue 15)

The work of Beverley Rosen Simons exhilarates and terrifies in the same breath. The exhilaration extends from her explicit understanding of the craft of authorship. She is prolific in her creative writing as evidenced by many manuscripts including short stories, radio plays, film scripts and play texts. Yet, for the most part, these texts are unavailable to the average reader as they have not been given publication. Her work is an
overwhelming exposure of the human condition. The intelligence and humor of her writing is biting and blunt. One need not walk on eggshells around Simons nor her work. She writes with the precision of a surgeon, offering irony or desperation depending on which way her pen cuts any given moment. As my analysis will show, her characters are molded and manipulated as precisely as her dramaturgy. In other words, the story she tells is every bit as clever as the means through which she tells it. The depth of her work comes from her obvious intelligence, her political and social representation, her fearlessness in storytelling and stagecraft including the usage of diverse theatrical techniques. One can read the influence of Brecht, Asian and Absurdist forms of drama from her earliest plays, like Prologue, Crusader, Crabdance, to her latest, now you see it..., the subject of this thesis.

Simons' work is often called terrifying because it speaks the truth. Like the aburdist genre, her plays invoke the tragedy of being human. Her content is deeply personal whether touching on social issues like incest, murder and adultery, or the private issues of isolation, dependency and betrayal. Whether immediately loved or violently opposed, the work of Simons is never without reaction. Crabdance had its Canadian premiere at the Vancouver Playhouse in 1972, and Malcolm Black cites Vancouver Sun critic Christopher Dafoe as stating that “[a] number of people have expressed dismay and consternation over Beverley Simons' play Crabdance, currently sending them around the bend at the Playhouse. Crabdance, as you can see, hits hard and leaves a hole” (Black 14). Many find her work daunting because it is never a quick and trouble-free read. Simons provides no simple answers. The issues she raises are complicated and not easily
resolved. The audience, in other words, is never let off the hook. Her work is demanding. It takes time and effort to understand her complex and varied thematic structures. To truly realize the depth of craft and theme, her work must be thoroughly mined. The difficulty of Simons’ drama does not fall within the domain of the text, but rather in the direction of it. If one does not have an innate feel for her rhythms, a respect for her craftsmanship or an ability to expose oneself through the texts, her work will prove as complicated and as inarticulate as the naysayers suggest.

The question remains: If Simons continues to write plays like now you see it..., challenging, creative and relevant to the contemporary dramatic landscape, why has she been shunted into the obscurity of Canadian theatre history? Why do the artistic directors of our professional theatres not acknowledge the relevancy of her work? Why was her work so rarely produced in the past? And can we change this before she is unable or unwilling to continue her dramatic work?

Many would say her case is not unique. In “1971, a dozen theatre professionals concerned about the development of Canadian playwriting and playwrights met” in order to fight what they perceived as the grave “abnormality of the situation in which [the Canadian playwright] works” (Rubin, Canadian Theatre History 302). Instead of being “prized and valued members of the creative community” (302), new Canadian plays were, in effect, locked out of production from the major theatres while playwrights struggled to earn a viable wage. Don Rubin states that this diverse group, convened under the auspices of the Canada Council, set out to debate “methods of support” (302).
They "examined the working conditions of the [Canadian] playwright, looked at his economic prospects, discussed practical ways to enhance his professional status and improve his economic lot, and sought ways to enable him to take his proper place in the theatre and in the cultural life of Canada" (302). What emerged as the Gaspe Manifesto were the conclusions and eight recommendations of these playwrights, producers and academics, including the encouragement of governmentally mandated Canadian content and more stability for artists to pursue their craft full time. Ironically, that time in the history of Canadian theatre is looked back upon fondly as the time of government subsidies for professional theatres, increased theatre facilities, and the beginnings of an alternative theatre scene through which we "search for a national cultural identity" (Brockett 567).

Simons comes from a generation of Canadian playwrights like "John Herbert, Robertson Davies, George Ryga, Michael Cook, Tom Hendry, James Reaney, [and] Carol Bolt," a few of whom were involved with the aforementioned manifesto and who "are [...] rarely or simply] not produced" today (Hay 7). While many of these authors have become canonized through Canadian theatre anthologies, and are critically studied in a university classroom, they are largely overlooked and forgotten on our professional stages. Unlike the American and British stages, Canada does not often reprise its past. Our professional theatres do not have a history of reproducing the plays that make up the Canadian canon. In fact, the one major exception where we can find Canadian "classics" presented on contemporary stages is in our universities. Our professional stages instead opt to reproduce the American and British greats like Williams and Shakespeare, offer the latest
in American and British contemporary drama or, to a much lesser degree, the newest of Canadian works. The vaunted list of playwrights above, the vanguard of the watershed years in Canadian drama, were not only under-produced in their own time, but have little hope of making it to the stage today. In this phenomenon Simons is not unique. The playwrights that changed the face of Canadian drama have today ended up in university curricula (if they are lucky), not on the stage. However, of this list, most of whom are now deceased, only Simons remains at work. Should the condition of her being unpublished and unproduced not be rectified? If not now, when? Interestingly, this year Stratford is producing The Donnellys: Sticks and Stones by James Reaney. The Festival describes the play as a “groundbreaking classic” (Stratford 2005 Visitors’ Guide 25). Yet, I think it is germane to note that this classic is being presented in the studio space at Stratford and not in one of their larger venues.

The publishing of Canadian drama also provides a dilemma for the struggling playwright. Plays will not be published without professional production. It therefore becomes even more vital to help bring Simons’ new work now you see it... to the stage. It must be published before it stops being “contemporary,” and it must be produced in order to be published. With its unique dramaturgy and explicit examination of relevant and controversial themes, like Crabdance, her most famous work to date, this play could conceivably find a niche in academic curricula.

The purpose of this thesis is to illuminate now you see it... in order to prove that she is as vital to contemporary Canadian drama as her past critical success has suggested. Her
play *now you see it...* awaits its first production. We must not let this play continue to be overlooked.

**Simons’ Theatrical and Dramaturgical History**

“[T]he playing areas could be defined very simply by props” (Simons, *now you see it...* 3)

Simons’ texts are tightly constructed, epic in scope and theme and, I believe, are relevant to contemporary audiences. It may be argued that if the producers of our professional theatres do not see the relevancy in Simons’ work, then it simply must not exist. I disagree. Simons “is not working within traditional dramatic standards. [Instead, she works] in a synthetic form, an amalgam of east and west, dance and drama, technology and wonder and her ability to synthesize these disparate elements makes her a dramatist of major proportions” (Rubin, *A Simons’ Casebook* 5). It is this combination of her craftsmanship and her articulation of intelligent, meaningful, thought provoking themes that resonates on a deeply human level.

A dynamic understanding of theatrical conventions and of theatricality is clearly present in one of Simons’ early plays, *Prologue*. As Don Rubin points out, “[o]ne may not become […] enamored of Ms. Simon’ work […] in the reading of it[,] but one will at least be recognizing that she is […] in full control each step of the way” (5). In this piece, three apologetic, sympathetic characters are Pirandellian in their search of an audience:
MAN: Asking an audience to come and watch...

SECOND WOMAN: And listen...

FIRST WOMAN: To us. Why not? We’re ghosts. It’s not often they’re able to examine ghosts.

MAN: It’s true. to audience When you leave, we dissolve. We exist as a product of your attention.

FIRST WOMAN: And the author’s.

MAN: What about her?

FIRST WOMAN: She wrote the lines. [...] I wouldn’t call Simons polite.

SECOND WOMAN: She has offended more than once. [...] She’s only thirty-six and she’s dated. [...] 

FIRST WOMAN: And she has yet to be produced in Toronto...

MAN: New York...

SECOND WOMAN: London...

ALL TOGETHER: Or CBC National Television.

SECOND WOMAN: Poor Beverley... (Prologue 10-14)

Even in this small section, Simons’ ironic humor and self-reflexive style are evident. She takes an offensive stance, challenging both audience and theatrical producer to engage with her material. If characters exist only as a product of audience attention, where does that leave the majority of her characters? Since they have not been brought to life on the professional stage, can it be argued that they do not exist? The problem is that they do exist and ought to be given an audience. Simons acknowledges that her plays ruffle the
feathers of the mainstream theatre practice. In the section above, one may read an almost prescient sense of what will later become her never-ending struggle to have her plays produced.

*Prologue* is the most overtly political of her plays, and as such, one can see the influence of Brecht. The political motivation of this piece, as well as its use of direct audience address links it directly to the tenets of ‘Epic’ theatre. Like many playwrights of the twentieth century who owe their dramaturgical structures and staging principles to innovators like Brecht, Meyerhold, Appia and Craig, many of Simons’ texts, including now you see it..., employ a myriad of dramatic conventions. When I claim the influence of Brecht upon her work, it is not, aside from the above *Prologue*, his political discourse that she emulates, but rather his liberation from realistic stage conventions. Simons’ manipulation of time and space, her ability to produce plays that require minimal sets, her use of screens and multimedia can all be seen as having been directly influenced by the revolutionary theatre practices that really took root after World War I. In addition, her use of diverse theatrical cultures and deeply embedded intertextuality exposes her creativity, wit and intelligence.

The wit and intelligence of Simons can be read through the penchant her characters have for mind games. The most evident and explicit example of this can be seen in Simons’ most famous character, Sadie Golden, the doomed protagonist of *Crabdance*. In this play, a middle-aged, lonely widow trades her power as a consumer for fantasy role-play as she negotiates with the door-to-door salesmen that enter her life. In exchange for the
promise to buy their wares, the three salesmen who join in her fantasy acquiesce to become the archetypal roles of Son, Husband and Lover. They suffer her abuses and humiliations, alternatively threatening Sadie and vying for her attention. In the end, however, Sadie is not able to remain in control of the game she has begun. As her house becomes inundated with salesmen, the last one to arrive, Mr. Underhill, who mysteriously enters from her “non-existent second floor” (Simons, Crabdance 119), reveals Sadie’s coffin, which has been literally under wraps onstage throughout the whole course of the play. As the “salesmen raise the coffin [with Sadie inside] and carry it slowly towards the staircase, [...] it is apparent now that there is definitely no second storey. The sound ceases abruptly. The cortege moves silently up the stairs to the void” (121).

“The cyclical movement of Crabdance is integral to its inner rhythms and to its vision of life. [...] The playing of games develops into an elaborate seduction after which the games become increasingly frenzied. The roles of husband, son and lover are woven inextricably into each stage of this process, which is centered on and orchestrated by Sadie Golden” (Raby 123). Like Samuel Beckett’s servant Clov, or the disgruntled family in Pirandello’s Six Characters in Search of an Author, the characters in Crabdance remain trapped in the world that has been written for them by the author. There is no escape from this limited playing space, and therefore, the characters have no choice but to begin again with the hopes that things may turn out better next time.

Despite a large amount of praise for this play, Crabdance has received only four professional productions in Canada. Malcolm Black, the director who premiered
Crabdance, sympathizes with Simons regarding her deep disappointment in being under produced. He says that “[a]nyone who can open wounds on paper as Beverley did ends up with some pretty livid scars” (9). In other words, critics and producers retaliate against Simons’ challenging texts by dismissing them. Quoted by Black, another review displays the misguided personal attacks which Simons suffered as a result of her work: “Pity Mr. Simons if the leading lady in Crabdance is a self-portrait of his wife” (16). Negative attention garnered from her work often comes in the form of a personal attack on Simons, equating author with character. Praise for her work is characterized by being solely about her unique writing style, her resonance in the social landscape and the challenging nature of her written material.

Those who disliked the play would perhaps decry many of the good reviews as hyperbolic in tone, yet as Black quotes from the Seattle Times, Simons “gave the actors a lot to work with” (11), as she always does. Simons endows her actors with a great amount of responsibility. Her earliest monodrama, Preparing, follows the life of Jeannie as she moves from rambunctious adolescent to curmudgeonly grandmother. The play begins with the brash rebellion of early teens. As JEANNIE talks, adjusts her dress, hair and make-up, she matures; but always present is her growing sexual power, her fear, her quick ironic mind, her candour. The monologue ends with the brash indifference of old age. [...] It could be done anywhere without special lighting [...] the shifts of emotion and time happen through her. (Preparing 26)
For Simons, the actors carry the brunt of her detailed and specific rhythmic structures. When she writes her plays, Simons has a clear vision of the play as it ought to be produced onstage. While she leaves room for the creative input of the artists involved in the production, she offers extensive guidelines and suggestions. As evidenced by the stage directions for *Preparing* above, Simons places her trust in the actress and the director, but does not leave them without explicit guidance. In her own words, this play “belongs to the actress” (*Preparing* 26).

Since the beginning of her playwriting career, Simons has employed a rich and varied dramaturgical style. Even as a young writer, she moved quickly away from the tragic realism of her first full length drama, *The Elephant and the Jewish Question*, towards an appreciation of metaphor, symbolism and self-deprecating wit:

FIRST WOMAN: We all know Simons uses symbols.
SECOND WOMAN: Then what do we stand for?
MAN: Can’t be the four directions.
SECOND WOMAN: Nor the seasons.
FIRST WOMAN: The primary colours?
SECOND WOMAN: The eternal Triangle?
FIRST WOMAN: Potential there.
MAN: She’s done it.
SECOND WOMAN: Oh. (*Prologue* 12-13)
Dramaturgically, her plays resonate with, and reproduce, absurdist elements including repetition, isolation and personal exile. We can see from the section above that her characters struggle to figure out who they are. While this process of discovery is not always as explicit as above, even Simons’ most mainstream play to date, *now you see it...*, expressly deals with characters yearning for a clear sense of self.

The third major influence on Simons’ writing is Oriental dramaturgy. Simons embraces many aspects of Eastern staging techniques including, for example, the “helper” figure used in Noh drama, employed to great effect in two of her plays, *The Crusader* and *Leela Means To Play*, as well as allusions to, and use of, the stylization found in Kabuki and Kathakali drama. As Martin Morrow points out, “Simons [...] wears her Asian influences on her sleeve” (52).

By the time we come to *now you see it...*, all three of the aforementioned conventions / stylistic genres, Absurdism, Brechtianism and Orientalism, can be found to varying degrees within the work. Throughout most of the play, she has simultaneous scenes occurring. In other words two two-person scenes take place on the same stage. Each scene is discrete in terms of characters and location, but they are wholly dependent on each other for meaning and lyrical counterpoint. While *now you see it...* may be the most thematically mainstream of her later works, dramaturgically it is her most complex. Simons’ dramaturgy has always been complex, but *now you see it...* truly takes it to another level by splitting the stage and having concurrent scenes happen simultaneously. The challenge is to make the dialogue intelligible rather than a mere soundscape of noise.
How and why she parallels the scenes in rhythm and meaning will be examined later in this thesis. However, we must first address the issue of counterpoint.

**A Point About Counterpoint**


One of the major claims of those unwilling to produce *now you see it*... is that Simons’ “technique of simultaneous scenes is something that exists only in her own imagination; it barely works on the page, [...] it will be a nightmare to rehearse, placing iron clamps around the creativity of both the actors and the director” (Kareda). During his life, Urjo Kareda was an important figure in, and a great champion of Canadian theatre. His background was “dramaturgical and literary,” and he was particularly enamored with the “daring and idealism of those who risked producing new works” (Zimmerman 211). His involvement with, and importance to theatre in Canada is undeniable. “There is hardly a playwright in the country who has not had a career connection with Urjo Kareda, the consummate broker of Canadian drama” (212). I will return to Kareda’s assertion that *now you see it*... is too difficult to produce later in my analysis. Yet, I cannot help but wonder if in my estimation of her challenging dramaturgy, am I valuing qualities in this play that do not actually exist? Why is it that I can see the unique complexity of this script, while others cannot?

Simons uses the simultaneous scene technique more than most playwrights, but many plays use this dual scene convention. In fact, two such plays have been presented on Vancouver stages this season, namely *Copenhagen* and *Enchanted April*. While both of
these plays make use of a split-stage dramaturgy, where the two simultaneous scenes are played in their own distinct worlds, each play does it for only one scene within the play, unlike Simons who uses the convention for the entirety of her piece. While it fits dramaturgically into Copenhagen because the whole play uses non-realistic conventions of repetition and manipulation of time and space, in Enchanted April this type of dramaturgy is entirely at odds with the sense of realism which the play tries hard to create. Since it is not integral to the plot, the split-stage in this play comes across as pretentious. The playwright breaks his realistic convention for one short scene, and never returns to a non-realistic dramaturgy. All three plays engage to some degree in a fluidity of scene transitions. However, by the second act of Enchanted April, which takes place entirely in one location, the play uses only realistic conventions. Therefore the split-scene convention used just prior to intermission is entirely out of place. In contrast, this convention in Simons’ work is fundamental to both the meaning and the staging of the drama.

In order to illuminate the complex and integral way in which Simons employs her split-stage dramaturgy, I would like to examine this same convention as it is used in both Copenhagen and Enchanted April. In Copenhagen, Michael Frayn begins his play without any stage directions. It becomes evident quite quickly that the play takes place in the afterlife where “no one can be hurt […nor] betrayed” (4). As Frayn introduces his characters and the major ideas with which his play is concerned, he depicts Niels Bohr in conversation with his wife, Margrethe. Counterpointing this is the private rumination of Werner Heisenberg as he struggles to sort through the same issues and memories as the
Bohrs. However, while the Bohrs remain oblivious to the thoughts of Heisenberg, he is able to interject and react to their dialogue. In other words, Heisenberg can clearly hear the Bohrs, but they are ignorant of his presence. Slowly, these three characters enter into the same space and time and are able to interact in full acknowledgment of the others.

**Bohr** [...] Another year or so and he’d got uncertainty.

**Margrethe** And you’d done complementarity.

**Bohr** We argued them both out together.

**Heisenberg** We did most of our best work together.

**Bohr** Heisenberg usually led the way.

**Heisenberg** Bohr made sense of it all.

**Bohr** We operated like a business.

**Heisenberg** Chairman and managing director.

**Margrethe** Father and son.

**Heisenberg** A family business.

**Margrethe** Even though we had sons of our own.

**Bohr** And we went on working together long after he ceased to be my assistant.

**Heisenberg** Long after I’d left Copenhagen in 1927 and gone back to Germany. Long after I had a chair and a family of my own.

**Margrethe** Then the Nazis came to power...

**Bohr** And it got more and more difficult. When the war broke out – impossible. Until that day in 1941.

**Margrethe** When it finished forever.

**Bohr** Yes, why did he do it? *(Copenhagen 5-6)*
Frayn’s use of counterpoint is intelligent and evocative. However, it is not the same kind of counterpoint that Simons uses because it deals explicitly with the past and memory rather than the present or future. In other words, Frayn splits his stage to show the dialectic of two past worlds while Simons uses a split stage to conflate two separate stories into one. Frayn uses this technique to collectively unscramble memory. A single character agrees or disagrees with, and reiterates the sentiments of the other two characters. Simons, on the other hand, uses this counterpoint as a way to juxtapose character thoughts, beliefs and motivations.

In *Enchanted April*, Matthew Barber’s use of split-stage offers nothing. It does not raise the dramatic tension, nor does it have the same intelligent function that it has in both Frayn’s and Simons’ plays. The stakes are never raised in this play even though the familial problems are similar to the breakdown of family that occurs in *now you see it*.... In this lighthearted, non-challenging play, the prudishness of Rose and the philandering of her husband, Frederick, are contrasted with the vibrancy of Lotty and the disregard of her by her husband Mellersh. Here is an example of Barber’s use of split-stage:

FREDERICK. Well, now. You’re up late!

ROSE. Yes, Frederick. There’s something I need to speak to you about.

LOTTY. May I speak to you about something, Mellersh?

MELLERSH. It so happens I have something to speak to you about as well. You tell me yours, and then I’ll tell you mine.
FREDERICK. Could it wait until morning? Once again Mr. Ayers was a success, and once again Mr. Arnott is exhausted. [...] 
LOTTY. A friend has invited me. [...] 
MELLERSH. Who? 
FREDERICK. Rose? 
LOTTY. Rose. 
MELLERSH. Rose? 
ROSE. We can’t go back, Frederick. 
MELLERSH. Rose who? 
ROSE. We can only go forward. (Enchanted April 29-30)

Since Barber never comes back to this technique, nor does he employ any other anti-illusionist technique, aside from the occasional direct address at the very beginning of the play, one must question its usefulness. While it may be said that he employs this technique to parallel the familial experiences of his two leading ladies, since that parallel is never again juxtaposed in the same way, the above scene stands out as being different from the rest of his text.

In contrast, the specificity and challenging rhythmical structure of Simons’ split-stage will become apparent as I move through the critical appraisal of her work, now you see it.... Below is the opening sequence of Simons’ play. In their respective homes, two couples are dressing for a dinner party. There are two ways to read the excerpt. Either read down one column to understand the flow of one couple alone, or read the lines in
sequence to get a glimpse of the overall acting rhythm and intellectual counterpoint. Pay particular attention to the disruptions when an actor’s line looks like it is placed on hold to allow unconnected dialogue to come from the other couple.

JUDITH: What should I wear?
MARK: Give ‘im your regal look, one of your long skirts...

ISABEL: At least change your jacket...

MARK: It’ll either be your seafood bisque or your gorgeous ass...

ISABEL: I want you to be comfortable, Thomas.

MARK: He’ll be ready to agree to anything. [...] JUDITH: [Thomas is] a decent man. He shares our ethics.
MARK: According to whom?

ISABEL: They’re Iris’s friends.

JUDITH: According to Iris.
MARK: Why else would Judith, the unrelenting, open the sacred domestic gates to strangers?

ISABEL: She’ll ask them what they think of us.
JUDITH: They’re not strangers.

THOMAS: If Ms. McCauley has described us as gods…

MARK: I recognize the type.

THOMAS: …it’s our duty to subvert the image.

MARK: Trust me.

ISABEL: Wear it for me then. […]

THOMAS: For whom?

ISABEL: *(Her voice changes)* For Eleanor…of Aquitaine…for Cleopatra…for your Turkish horse and the sweet lady of knives…

THOMAS: For Isabel. As his mistress directs, her Ferdinand obeys (2-3).

I believe that anyone reading this script is instantly put off by the unusual look of the text. Although Simons wrote the script this way to ease understanding as each “scene can be read and understood by reading down one column […] but when read in interlocking order – that is, across the page – it will become apparent how the scenes act as a counterpoint and comment on one another” *(Cast page)*, this unique dramaturgy most certainly acts as the play’s first deterrent. Compared with the similar scene from *Enchanted April*, one can see that in Simons’ work, the characters are illuminated
specifically by the contrasting scenes at play. Rather than using this technique to be clever, as Barber does, Simons uses it to force judgment and critical character evaluations from her audience.

**Staging and Rhythm**

Characters are uniquely juxtaposed in Simons' play. There is a major difference between four characters occupying different spaces, like the two areas needed above to act as two separate bedrooms, and the same characters occupying the same space, like the party scene that takes place after this opening sequence. When two separate scenes occur simultaneously, it allows characters' dialogue to intersect with an entirely different scene, without directly commenting on it. In other words, with simultaneous scenes happening, the audience is aware that one conversation relates to and challenges another conversation, even though all four characters are not playing in the same emotional or physical space.

The real question is whether or not this strict rhythmic and dramatic structure will indeed "be a nightmare to rehearse [...] by placing iron clamps around the creativity of both the actors and the director" (Kareda). I would like to look closely at the following four lines in order to envision them as they will function onstage:

ISABEL: At least change your jacket...

MARK: It'll either be your seafood bisque or your gorgeous ass...
ISABEL: I want you to be comfortable, Thomas.

MARK: He’ll be ready to agree to anything. (2)

First, look at how Simons’ juxtaposition creates meaning for the audience. The caring of Isabel for her husband’s welfare is contrasted with the pimp-like womanizing of Mark. Barely five lines into the play, Simons has already alienated a majority of the older or more prudish theatre patrons. She places the audience on edge with Mark’s crass way of speaking, and when Isabel says, “I want you to be comfortable,” one may almost imagine Simons is ironically speaking, through Isabel, to her audience.

Rather than see this dialogue as constricting, I see in it Simons’ accounting for the movement and rhythm of daily life. Through the course of this scene, Thomas must clearly have on a particular outfit, he may regard himself in the mirror, change his jacket, perhaps puts on a tie. In life, people do not often speak in full, unbroken sentences, especially when they are at home or in the company of someone whom they know very well. The rhythm of Simons’ writing is present in its intricacy of dialogue. It is written like an operatic score.

As a child, Simons was a musical prodigy, “performing publicly as well as teaching piano to adults and children at the age of 13” (A Biographical Checklist 28). Influenced by a life-long love of music, the lines in now you see it...are written as lyrical duets and
quartets. How can this function on the stage? One option is to emphasize certain lines. In other words, as a director, one picks what is most important to the scene and ensures that those lines are heard above others, just as the strings or woodwinds are accentuated in a particular operatic movement. Another option is to block the scene in such a way that focus is directed exactly where it is required at any given moment. In other words, through lighting and the physical placement of actors, directors can lead the audience to see primarily what they want seen. Moving an actor to the front of the stage or placing them on a different level will draw an audience’s attention toward them, for example.

Once this play is given the chance to be embodied by actors, I believe that the innate rhythmic structure will be as natural as a heartbeat. Actors will instinctually feel how to fill in speech gaps, because they come out of real speech patterns. That is why this simultaneous scenes structure can be evidenced in all three plays listed above. It is not “something that exists only in [Simons’] imagination” (Kareda).

A subtle gesture, a moment of eye contact, or a thought process may take roughly the same amount of time as a character does in delivering a line. If every moment for the actor is filled with the reality of the character, the life-rhythm of this play should come naturally. While this play will always be a challenge for the audience, if the director and actors understand the rhythmic intricacies and are able to find the freedom within the dialogic constriction, the play should not be difficult to follow. If one is not able to keep up with the plot, the feeling of the play will no doubt be palpable.
Simons evokes mood through lighting, set, costume, projections and music. The stage proper is paradoxically luxuriant and bare at the same time. Rich colors used in lighting design will augment the richness of costume and set. Even if this play is produced on a minimal budget, one may create the sense of wealth, power and luxury that fills the lives of these characters. Simons’ inclusion of projections allows the stage space to become any time or place. For example, through a light change, a projection and some music, the audience moves from Iris’ condo to Mark’s in seconds.

It is interesting to note that of these technical aspects, Simons almost never offers suggestions for sound cues. Since she grew up as a pianist, one may assume that music is an important part of Simons’ life and, therefore, one would expect an explicitly detailed suggestion for music. Yet, while Simons explains in detail what she wants to see in visual terms, she includes a minimal sound score. Instead, her dialogue is representative of her musical choice. In other words, she hears the dialogue as the play’s score. Of course, in production ambient sound is added to ease the transitions of changing locations and scenes. Simons leaves those choices to the director.
III. DETAILED ANALYSIS OF *NOW YOU SEE IT*...

"Multiple levels are involved in the creative act; it's out of a deeper wisdom that I write. For me, at least, that wisdom is not on tap to analyze current political situations or new dramatic structure, though both may be part of the initial motive energy. The creative voice is more devious. It absorbs facts, demands, urges, experiences; I may present it with themes and potential characters; as to an oracle the questions must be put; but once the work of intellect is complete, I can only wait for floors, walls, ceilings, the logical divisions of the mind out of which an essay would naturally be constructed, to dissolve and reshape" (Simons, "Epilogue to 'Prologue'" 281)

*now you see it*... explores the difficulty of finding a universal truth in a society where diverse cultures, communities and world views are juxtaposed. It examines issues of cultural diversity most notably through the interplay of two couples. The Sugarmans are a liberal Jewish couple comprised of a philandering lawyer / husband and an ex-social worker / stay-at-home mother who has given up her career in order to fulfill her vision of motherhood. The Fletchers are a well respected Christian couple in which the abusive doctor / husband participates in the fantasy role playing of his ex-actress wife, her form of denial. The relationships of these couples are challenged by their mutual female friend Iris.

Simons counterpoints her scenes both rhythmically and intellectually. The strength of this play relies on a dual scene structure which allows the words to converge and divide
in both meaning and meter. Rhythmically, this text demands that an actor know far more than his or her own lines. Simons’ actors must constantly be alert to both what is happening with the scene partner with whom they speak and the scene that is playing out across the stage. Although this opposing scene has no connection to what the character says or is doing, the actor must be listening for cue lines and have a general awareness of the other actors. Technically speaking, this dual scene structure and simultaneity of dialogue is the most daunting aspect of Simons’ play for reader, director, and actor. Through a detailed dramaturgical exploration of the text, I will illuminate the necessity of this challenging and complicated form of theatrical invention.

Dramaturgical Report

“She talks a lot about free form….But does she ever let us improvise? Oh, no. She defines…Analyzes…Conceptualizes…Abstracts…Eliminates…Regurgitates […] Trick rides, tailspins, strong stomachs needed” (Simons, Prologue 12-13)

now you see it...has never been published and will not be afforded that option until it has had its first mounting. My dramaturgical function toward this script is to examine how it will move from the page to the stage. In order to facilitate understanding of this thesis as it examines the complexity of Simons’s play, I will provide a detailed plot and character summary.

The first way I come to any script is as a dramaturge asking questions: Are the characters and situations real and logical to the world that the author has created? What do I need to
research in order to better understand this text in terms of history, place and context?
Does the play’s structure work? Do I understand author’s intent? Can I “see” the play in my mind?

Characters
All characters in this play are multifaceted and complex, constantly transforming and remaking / reshaping their lives. It is left up to the audience to see them for who they really are, as the characters never have any epiphany of self-awareness. Ideally, upon reflection, audience members will have an increased attentiveness to their own ethical and moral positioning.

The scenes are unrestricted in their flow from one to the next. A lighting cue, an actor’s movement or a sound easily transports us from one location to another. In other words, the scenes cross fade, bleeding into each other. The benefit of this is that it allows the audience to stay with the characters through their transitions. In other words, the audience sees them as they move physically and emotionally from being “out” to being “home”. In this way, Simons’ dramaturgy works to advance her theme: the audience literally sees the characters taking off their public mask and replacing it with a domestic one. Yet, the problem that remains for each of the characters is that there is “no face under the mask” (24).

I have included two types of character description. The first is a “snap shot” gleaned mostly from the cast list provided by Simons. The second is a detailed analysis using
lines spoken by characters about themselves and about each other. This is commonly employed as an acting technique in order to give actors a broader picture of the multiplicities found within the character they portray.

Judith Sugarman – early 40’s. Retired social worker. Mother of four with an “uncompromising social and personal conscience” (Cast List).

Judith is “unrelenting” (2) in her rigidly applied moral consciousness; she “spares no-one” (7). She has a “fetish for embalming” (4), and therefore Mark, an ever-changing, fallible human being, will never be able to meet her exacting expectations. Mark claims Judith is “anti-social […and] completely without social conscience” (8). He supports this argument by reminding her, in front of the Fletchers, that his “balls [were] on the scale each month” in order to afford such a secluded house in “a remarkable location” (4). She has “[frozen [Mark] out” (9) because “the goddess has turned to stone” (21).

Through the couple’s sexual tensions we see the “he said / she said” of their married life. Judith is so restricted by her morality that she is almost paralyzed. When her children look at her “it’s terrifying. What [she does or says] will be imprinted deep inside them: it might not show until twenty or thirty years from now” (56). She is fearful of emotionally harming her children. However, she senses that this disastrous result is ubiquitous in humankind. Indeed, all of the characters Simons offers in this play are emotionally stunted, owing, in part, to their childhoods. “Jay’s missing a skin: she doesn’t watch the evening news; she lives it. It’s our kids with the bloated bellies; it’s our house being bombed” (50, Simons’ emphasis). As an ex-social worker she is able to offer advice,
solving all of her friends' problems, but not her own. Her ability to see into the heart of someone else's predicament is contrasted with the denial of her familial crisis. She's “blind” to Mark's indiscretions (56), yet he feels that there is "no mercy in that bitch" (62). She has become “sadly petty” (63), “a materialist” (43). Judith slowly learns how to relax her moral rigidity as evidenced by her daily walks. The route is unplanned. She is "guided" by her body as it “cruises [...] through the city in search [...] of men at work” (70).

Mark Sugarman – mid 40’s. A philandering defense lawyer who “feeds on combat and praise” (Cast List). His marriage is on the rocks. He has hidden a second family for six years.

Mark is a “crayon socialist” (32) who “likes to draw in big, bright colours” (33). He is a crayon moralist, too. He fights for justice for his clients while being patently unjust to his wife. Judith believes that “Mark is not renowned for his collecting skills” (20), but considering that he is effectively supporting three households, his apartment, the house he shares with Judith, and the home he provides for Mona, he must be able to collect what he is owed for legal counsel. He has, however, let the bills and mortgage on Judith’s home fall into arrears. Mark is evidently neglectful of his family. His daughter Jenny “had her tonsils out” but Mark “forgot” (40). Though he “brought back material for [his son] Aaron, great stuff for his law project, [...] it was due last week” and Aaron had “postponed three times for [...] Mark” (41). Aside from Iris and Mona, Mark also cheats on his wife with professional call girls. Mark claims that everything he has done, he has
done for his family. Yet, as Judith points out, he never asked them what they wanted, and they certainly do not benefit from his adultery. In Mark’s practice of law, his philandering, and in the fact that he has an entire other family, one can see the enormous pressure exerted upon him. He says he does not know who he is. Yet, he is filled with so much exuberant life energy that he is really living multiple lives. He would like to believe that he practices law altruistically, as everyone is entitled to a fair trial, but it is clear that what he loves is the thrill of power and prestige. He does not allow any ethical or personal ideas of justice to enter into his job. He must only defend his clients to the letter of the law. It is not his place to decide innocence or guilt, but to make sure his clients are aware of their rights.

Iris McCauley – early 40’s lawyer. A “feminist; bi-sexual” who is friends with both of the women (Cast List). She has an affair with both Mark and Isabel.

Iris lives in many worlds as Mark does, but her energy is contained. She relies on her calm, cool exterior in order to succeed in a male dominated work force. When she and Mark defend an East Indian father and son charged with the murder of their cousin/niece, she prevails for the son by “going for [Mark’s] client’s throat” (51). She claims that she does not “respect” Mark, but has sex with him anyway (25). She has known him for years and began sleeping with him shortly after Judith introduced them. “Legal argument does make [her] horny” (52), which is why she sleeps with her married “learned adversary[ies]” (31). Iris gives “[r]oses not crabs” (32) to the wives of the men she sleeps with and sends their husbands back with “renewed patience with the kids
And innovation in bed " (31). Therefore, Iris sees herself as a positive contributor to their family life. While she emotionally bonds with women, she uses men for sexual fulfillment. Sexually, she is “safe and discreet” (31) and therefore, her relationship with Mark is clinical in its emotion. Their coupling is animal desire amounting to nothing romantically deeper than “sensual involvement” (31). Iris’ relationship with both Judith and Isabel is much more complicated. Her reasons for trying to seduce them, on separate occasions, has more to do with her need to offer something to them, rather than to take for herself. Her bi-sexual nature allows her to cross into multiple worlds and different modes of being. She plays in the domesticity of womanhood as easily as the competitive workplace of her male counterparts.

Isabel Fletcher – early 40’s. Retired actress / dancer. Moves “as if onstage” (Cast List). Plays different roles in an adult, private game of dress up. Her husband is charged with her murder; her final scene is posthumous.

Isabel is “a fool” (22). She “earns every piece” of jewelry (28) she gets from her husband, the doctor. She and Thomas have a destructive co-dependency: “THOMAS hits her; SHE seizes his hand [...] ISABEL kisses his hand, then places it on her breast or crotch” (39). She believes she is deserving of the physical abuse as she is “an awful person” (64). She claims that Thomas’ abuse of her “calls [her] back” to reality. Without him, she would have “left [her] body long ago” (65). Isabel regards herself as a shell of a human. She has no substance other than her myriad of acted characters. “They say, as you get older, more and more it shows on your skin who and what you are [...] I’m
nobody at all. He undresses me in the dark so neither of us can see” (63). When she is finally able and willing to truly open herself to Iris, “[s]he takes off her jacket, revealing bruises and fresh wounds: until now she’s worn clothing with long sleeves to the wrist” (64). Isabel believes that she has “done terrible things in her life” (64), like having “ugly thoughts. [...] While beauty is only skin deep [...] thoughts are real” (65). Despite her years in the theatre and the fact that she has raised two children, Thomas says she has “never worked a day in [her] life! [She] never thinks of anyone but [herself]. What kind of a freak [is she]? [She doesn’t] even care for [her] children” (53). Thomas drugs her to keep her pliable and receptive to his control: “(Approaching Isabel with a small bottle) Open up, my gypsy queen: it’s not poison. [...] It allows us to play” (54). Isabel believes that her outer shell is disappearing like her inner core. Her “skin is turning to dust [...] Most of [her] has flaked away [...she’s] drying and flaking; it’s almost gone” (61). Isabel lives through fantasy. Usually, this is depicted in her costume changes that denote historical characters through which she seduces her husband, Thomas. Her most frightening fantasy is closer to delusion than desire, however. At the beginning of act two, Thomas tells Isabel about a “woman [who] died today...under [his] hands” (53). He “could see [his patient]; it was like a mist seeping out of her nostrils, her ears, all the crevices in her body. If [he] could have stopped them up! [...] If they’d plugged the openings the way [he] told them, [he] might still be able to catch her. But she escaped; she slipped through” (53). At the end of the play, Isabel tries in vain to keep her spirit from slipping away. In her final offstage confrontation with Thomas, she had “taken out the stones from her emerald earrings and necklace; her pearls, too: she’d shoved them up her vagina. Jade in her anus. Rubies in her mouth. Into every orifice he might consider.
Diamonds up her nostrils” (84-85). Yet, this literal stopping up of her body is not enough to prevent her death. Iris misreads this moment. She believes that Isabel wants to keep Thomas out, when what she really wants is to keep herself – her spirit – in.

Thomas Fletcher – mid 40’s. A “highly respected” obstetrician/gynecologist. His “power emanates from controlled rage” (Cast List).

The apotheosis of Thomas, the vision of him as “a Prince of God” (11) is circumscribed by his feigned humility. If people believe he is a god, it is his “duty to subvert the image” (2). Yet, he has always been a winner in the eyes of the public. He did well through medical school and now has an enviable medical practice. The nurses at the Catholic hospital “adore him” (11). His father “P.T. Fletcher is a devout Christian” (19), whom Thomas has tried to emulate. He has an ambiguous sexual relationship with his daughter Miranda (24). He believes it is “[b]etter to pay for housekeepers and pay for whores” (61), because women and their emotions get in the way. Women have “adopted the language of men, the grammar of reason, but it’s by rote [...] it is] [m]imickry [sic], like chimpanzees” (62). “Women are breeders” (64), nothing more. They are “even further down on the evolutionary ladder than [men] are [...] They flounder in a soup of menstrual blood and emotion and they want [men] to drown with them” (65). Thomas’ disgust of his wife, Isabel, is palpable. “And then there are women like Isabel [...] They don’t even have the instinct to look after their young [...] Which makes them nearly worthless [...] they need to be controlled” (66). Mark queries how Thomas “let[s] it out [...]his] shit. Everyone’s got it; some [...]people carry it] closer to the surface, that’s all”
(15). Thomas releases his anxiety and stress through drink, beating his wife and hunting. He denies that he is a savage animal and indeed, he is the most refined on the surface. However, underneath his veneer lies a brutal killer.

Setting

Vancouver, British Columbia. Present day, over the course of many months. With simultaneous conversations occurring throughout, more than one playing space at a time is often in use. These simultaneous scenes are not the same length and so the text often moves from four voices to two or three. The playing space must double for many locations. While this play can easily be produced as ‘poor theatre’, changing scenes and spaces primarily through lights and sound, it would also benefit from the hint of a beautifully constructed West Vancouver home, plush carpets, wooden beams, rich fabrics and colors, and real furniture. The stage is deployed as the Fletcher and the Sugarman living spaces, a café, Mark’s apartment, a motel, and Iris’ condominium, so ease of transitions is a must. Scrims and projections are employed to help reveal location and to add relevant photography, depicting character histories, court cases, Isabel’s fantasies and symbolic paintings.

Synopsis

Act One

Like much of Simons’ work, this two-act play is truly an ensemble piece. There is no single protagonist; all five characters are fleshed out individuals with distinct voices. The
independent counterpoint of scenes allows for a rhythmic and intellectual juxtaposition of characters.

As the play opens, (see the opening dialogue in A Point About Counterpoint) the Sugarmans and the Fletchers are in their respective bedrooms preparing to meet for the first time at the Sugarman’s home in West Vancouver. At Iris’s suggestion, before the play proper has begun, Mark has invited the Fletchers to dinner, intending to ask Thomas to appear as the medical expert for him in a criminal court case. This opening revelation of the two couples in their bedrooms succinctly contrasts their relationships. Due to the simultaneity of the dialogue, we quickly see how the marital relationships differ. The concurrent scene-work allows for a unique kind of juxtaposition that otherwise would not be present. If the scenes were played one after the other instead of concurrently, the conflicting personalities would not be as dynamically depicted. Their similarities and differences would not be as clearly demarcated.

On the surface, the Fletchers are reserved and pretentious while the Sugarmans are more earthy and liberal. Thomas has been brought up “properly” in a powerful and respected upper class home while Mark is vulgar and crude, surviving on his street (by way of law school) wits. Isabel knows that Thomas is in total control, accepting that every detail of their life must meet his exacting standards. Judith, on the other hand, sees her marriage to Mark as a partnership. She knows where the cheque book is and to whom to write the bills. She believes that she and Mark “respect each other; [that they are] peers” (30).
This brief opening sequence in which we see the home life of the two couples sets the audience up for a series of character reversals. Simons has Judith asking her husband for clothing advice, wanting to help him achieve his goal of impressing the Fletchers. In part, this shows a lack of the self-reliance and moral judgment that eventually becomes the main source of her power throughout the play. Isabel, on the other hand, tries to command Thomas to change his jacket. Yet, it is only through her role-playing that Isabel can actually exert any kind of control over Thomas. She has no power over him as his wife, but in character she at least has the power to seduce.

The lights rise on the whole stage and the couples fluidly come together. It is after dinner, time has passed. Through the remainder of the dinner party, the two couples verbally spar, sizing each other up. Thomas praises his wife’s beauty and skill, but apologetically comments on Isabel’s lack of intelligence and overwrought imagination. Mark praises his wife’s intellect, but admonishes her for her overpowering life force and her sexual neglect of him.

The men leave and eventually end up in another room playing ping pong. When the men have gone, Judith moves into the kitchen in order to prepare dessert. This affords Isabel time alone onstage. She performs a monologue about the greatness of Thomas, and how a woman’s most important job is to provide a supportive home-life for her husband. After ping pong, Mark brings out his secret stash of pot. Thomas declines to indulge. As Mark smokes the marijuana, Judith brings cognac for her and Isabel to preview before dessert. While she slowly sips her drink, Isabel drinks rather heavily. This counterpoint of vices
succinctly juxtaposes the addictive nature of each individual. Here, Mark and Isabel's over-indulgence is contrasted with Judith and Thomas's reserve. The differing attitudes of male / female perspectives are also contrasted:

ISABEL: So many people wilt, don't they? But your husband is like mine…

MARK: We can work up a sweat...[by playing ping pong].

ISABEL: They're not the least bit concerned about popularity, either of them.

MARK: It'll give the girls time to compare recipes...He serves; Thomas returns.

ISABEL: They're men of conscience.

MARK: ...and stretchmarks. Mark's game is at first casual; he expects an easy victory.

ISABEL: Not many of those anymore. Without self interest, really.

MARK: Yours. (11)

The irony of this counterpoint is that these “men of conscience” belittle their wives by implying that they will have nothing better to talk about than domestic realities. Their well-mannered game of ping pong quickly turns into an all out battle which undercuts their chivalry, belying the female belief that they are entirely without self interest. In this
scene, Mark’s anger is displayed as he throws a ping pong paddle over a losing point. His quick temper and outward display of emotion is contrasted with the reserved control of Thomas. Thomas appears to keep all his anger and anxiety inside, though it becomes apparent as the play progresses that he takes out his ire on Isabel. Again, in this opening sequence, Simons plays with our initial understanding of these characters in order to deepen the impact as their true natures come to the fore. We dismiss Mark for his hotheaded temper and view Thomas as the paragon of civility, yet later the horrific truth about Thomas comes out and Mark really does not seem so bad in comparison.

As Isabel forces comparison between her husband and Judith’s, we see Mark fall short as the ideal spouse:

ISABEL: There’s no-one I know
who listens like Thomas. Except
maybe Jamie; he’s our eldest.

Mark goes to the freezer.

MARK: (A stage whisper) Fletcher. Hey!

ISABEL: Is Mark like that?

MARK: Come look!

JUDITH: Not quite.

MARK: There she is…my wife’s psyche.
Or maybe her soul [...] I wonder what would happen if I left the door open…(14)
Metaphorically, Mark does leave the door of his wife’s psyche open. It is a slow thaw, but through the course of the play, Judith awakens to the reality of her marriage. Through his philandering and familial denial, Mark opens the door for Judith to discover her desperate need for acknowledgement. Marks’s growing familial neglect gives Judith the rationale to finally admit the truth about her husband.

When the couples come together again, it is Judith who brings up the real reason why the guests were invited for dinner. Mark has been hired by a woman whose negligent doctor, while performing an unauthorized hysterectomy, also “sewed her bladder to her stomach wall” (17). He wants a surgeon to be his medical expert for the case. Thomas leaves the dinner party agreeing to think about Mark’s offer though he realizes that the doctor in question (named “The Ripper” by Mark) is a formidable foe. Thomas had filed a complaint against this doctor before, but “his patient, the one he’d crippled” (18) ended up defending him and the case was dropped.

When the party breaks up and the couples are once again shown in their respective homes, we see clearly that neither marriage is as copasetic as the couples have outwardly projected during dinner. Their bragging and bolstering are seen as a front to cover the disharmony that is truly at the base of each relationship. In fact, both couples have major problems of isolation, victimization and desperation. While Mark feels that Judith has turned from him, giving all she has to her children, Isabel resents (with good cause) the
relationship between Thomas and their two children, especially their daughter, Miranda (see Thematic Devices below).

Isabel manages to seduce Thomas in the character of La Dame Dangereuse despite his admonishment that Judith “thought [she] was a fool” (22). Mark tries to seduce Judith, but in the end admits that all he needs is “a warm body next to [him]” (21). Mark and Judith fight over their conflicting needs and emotions. Both couples end up making love, to the satisfaction of the males only. Judith denies that she does it out of “duty” (24), but she does not feel intimate with her husband. Isabel’s intention is to please Thomas in order to prevent him from wandering to any other woman. At the end of this scene, Miranda cries out due to a bad dream. Thomas goes to her against Isabel’s wishes. Isabel pushes herself further into fantasy, dancing as the operatic heroine, Carmen, as a means of being in “denial of what is happening in the bedroom downstairs” (24).

Thematically speaking, regarding the children, Simons counterpoints Isabel’s renunciation: “I don’t care for my children” (34), against Judith’s prioritization, where she places the needs of her children above the needs and desires of her husband. Even though Judith admits to Iris that Mark “needs” her, that “[w]ithout [her] he wouldn’t exist” (26), she does not truly believe this true. She is almost prescient with the knowledge that Mark will betray her and so she protects herself from him by withdrawing her emotional dependency from her husband and placing it onto the children.
As Isabel’s dancing scene fades, it is replaced by Judith and Iris having coffee. Judith
tells Iris of a recurring dream in which Mark pulls off a mask that is “destroying him”,
yet when he does, “[h]e died; there was no face under the mask” (24). Iris, a self-
appointed “oracle” (28), tries to get Judith to see Mark’s philandering, but Judith remains
in denial. She turns on Iris, objecting to the fact that Iris sleeps with married men. Judith
claims that even in her dreams, she has never “betrayed” (25) Mark. While Judith goes
on to defend her relationship and Mark’s marital neglect, on the other side of the stage,
Mark shows Thomas his apartment in town. This counterpoint again sets up the male /
female dialectic: Judith defends her marriage and denies any problems while we see a
prideful Mark flaunting his adulterous ways. He has, in fact, invited over some
“professionals” to celebrate their victory in the courts against the “Ripper”. Mark offers
Thomas a share in the apartment to seal their working relationship. Thomas questions
Mark about the meaning of justice, a recurring theme in the play, and Mark brings up the
next case he is working on: an East Indian father and son murdered their niece/cousin
because she wed without their permission while her father remained in India. They claim
they killed her and her husband as an act of justice and pride, not passion. This touches a
chord with contemporary, topical issues of multiculturalism. In fact, the B.C. Supreme
Court has just found Mr. Rajinder Atwal guilty of the murder of his Indo-Canadian
daughter, slain due to an unsanctioned romance (Bellett, Vancouver Sun A1). Mark and
Iris remind us that a defense lawyer’s job is to defend the accused to the letter of the law.
In their opinion, legal justice cannot, and ought not, to be equated with personal or ethical
justice.
Meanwhile, Judith and Iris have finished their meeting and Isabel explains that she “exist[s] for Thomas William Fletcher” and that a “woman’s duty is to inspire, which means to change and change again […] When Thomas enters [their] bedroom, he never knows who he’ll find waiting for him” (36). Isabel teases Thomas that she’s being stalked. She purposely provokes him to violence and kisses the hand that strikes her.

Judith waits up for Mark who has just returned from a business trip. She thinks he has not been collecting fees from his clients and she feels he has been ignoring the family. Judith accuses Mark of having an affair. As he gives her excuses for being away from the family, the scene splits and Iris enters a motel room. Iris acts as an omnipotent presence hearing the argument between the couple and interjecting her thoughts, which only Mark hears. The scene continues with Mark playing to both women. He ends up naked in the motel room with Iris as Judith leaves. Thomas and Isabel act out another fantasy. This time, Thomas dominates. He physically hurts Isabel and her plaintive cry bleeds into the scene with Mark and Iris in the motel room though they are oblivious to her pain. They talk about the East Indian case as Iris will defend the son while Mark defends the father. They seduce each other.

**Act Two**

Thomas tells Isabel of the cutbacks to his operating time. His monologue is filled with personal paranoia. It is ambiguous whether the “he” that “was watching through the observation glass” (53) during a surgery in which Thomas lost a patient is the “Ripper” or Thomas’s deceased father. It is really the first time that we see the cracks in Thomas’s
smooth veneer. He is now drinking and popping pills on a regular basis, unable to reconcile his prestigious reputation with his internal growing confusion and self-doubt.

The male competition in this play is set up as a tug of war over their ability to control their will. Mark wins because Thomas becomes more like Mark than vice versa. In other words, Mark teaches Thomas to “hunt tail” and “hunt in the courtroom”, but Thomas never takes Mark to the forest to hunt his type of game. In the end, Thomas becomes more morally corrupt than Mark could ever dream. Whether it is a conscious effort or not, Mark liberates Fletcher from the bonds of societal correctness. He thinks that if he can bring Thomas down to his moral level as far as adultery and legality are concerned, then it will prove that Mark is not such a bad guy after all. In other words, if Mark can convince this paragon of virtue to have an affair, who can blame the “lesser” Mark for doing so? “So wha’ d’ya think [of the apartment]? From me to you, extras included. One month free rent; then an even split. Consider it, Fletcher” (27). And Thomas does consider it. In fact, by the end of the play, the apartment is shared by the two men. Mark convinces Thomas that “[w]omen like to nourish, men like to screw” (30), though this has not been Thomas’s marital experience, until now.

Even Thomas’s view of himself at the beginning of act two can be seen as Mark’s vision of him instead of his own. Early on in the play, Mark tells Thomas that as a lawyer he is “in theatre [...] The courtroom is a kind of theatre [...] while Thomas is] more like an engineer” (31). In act two, Thomas tells us he is an “inefficient engineer” (54), employing Mark’s terminology. This subtly shows Mark’s control over Thomas. He
sways Thomas's personal opinion. He brings him down to a level of moral degradation that Thomas would have opposed his entire life. Mark gives too much of himself away, Thomas keeps too much of himself tucked inside. Ultimately, Mark's way is superior. He may cheat on his wife, but he does not murder her.

Isabel promises Thomas that she will never leave him. In her new condo, Iris finally tells Judith, in no uncertain terms, that Mark is unfaithful.

The next scene occurs in the apartment that Mark and Thomas now share. Once again, Iris acts as an omniscient presence, commenting on the conversation between the two men although they do not hear her. Mark guides Thomas in the art of deceiving his wife. Thomas tells Mark that Isabel has left him and discovers that Mark already knew and advised her against it. They have invited "professional" women over again. Across the stage, Isabel has joined Iris. Isabel fears, as she undresses for Iris, that when she is divested of her mask of clothes and jewelry she will disappear altogether. She fears that her outer accoutrements define her, without them she is nothing. When the women exit, Judith begins a monologue about the secret walks she takes in order to ogle construction workers. In this monologue she speaks of herself as "I" and also as "she". In other words, she splits herself into the third person so that she may remain "respectable" (72). Although she is beginning to let her social constraints relax, she is still acutely aware of her moral rigidity.
Mark and Judith are at home. Judith has discovered that they have a final notice on their mortgage and their accounts have been drained. She learns that Mark has had another family for six years. Mark tries to convince Judith not to break up their marriage. He uses photos of the murdered Indian couple to illustrate how he has protected Judith from the “real world” (82). Thomas enters the other side of the stage with a gift for Isabel. He has forgotten that she has left him. As he drinks, he regresses and we learn that his “perfect” father was abusive toward him as a child. By the end of his speech, he decides to give his gift of jewelry to Miranda instead. Through his action of taking a costume belonging to Isabel, he indicates that he intends to place his daughter into the role that his wife willfully vacated. At the very end of the scene, after Judith tells Mark that their marriage is over and that he must move out of the family home, we learn that Isabel has gone back to Thomas because “she knows when she’s got it good” (82).

Thomas and Isabel are at home. Isabel is dressed, by an omnipotent Iris, as one of her medieval characters. Isabel is no longer in the present. Her mind has receded to the wooing ritual between her and Thomas. She is entirely in the world of fantasy. Thomas begs that Isabel see him for who he is, but he allows Iris to dress him in period costume matching what Isabel wears. He joins in her game of courtly romance and, for a brief moment, we are led to believe that perhaps Isabel will come out of this abusive relationship victoriously. Projected on a screen, photos of Isabel depict her as a number of historical and theatrical characters. When the lights go out, however, we hear Thomas savagely beat Isabel to death (see Thematic Devices below).
Mark tells Thomas that Iris would be a better choice as his defense lawyer for the murder of Isabel. Iris tells Judith how she “washed and prepared” (84) Isabel’s body. Judith asks how she can accept Thomas as a client, again showing the disconnect between personal, moral and legal justice.

The characters deliver their final lines to the audience as a bitter and ironic morality lesson, reminiscent of the moral coda in the opera *Don Giovanni*. The only one who appears to have gained any insight is Judith. It is implied that she has left Mark; however, she fears more than ever for the future of her children. She cannot reconcile Iris’s choice to defend Thomas with her knowledge that he killed Isabel, or at least, drove her to her death. Isabel comes back from the dead to reaffirm her love for Thomas and to defend their relationship.

**Thematic Devices**

**Violence Depicted Through Metaphor**

*now you see it...* is a dark, violent play. Surprisingly, Simons does not avoid violence onstage like many of her feminist counterparts. Instead, she uses the device of metaphor for the most harrowing of her violent events. While we do see scenes in which Thomas hits Isabel, and one scene in which he drugs her, the two most violent scenes that take place in the Fletcher household become highly theatrical. These two scenes in particular exemplify Simons’s creativity and dramaturgical manipulation. The first deals with incest and the second with murder.
After Isabel has seduced and satisfied her husband, Thomas, their daughter Miranda is heard crying off stage, having awoken from a bad dream. Thomas exits the bedroom to go to Miranda instead of staying with his wife, heeding her physical and emotional pleas. Upon his leaving, there is a “[s]topping sound in the dark; clapping, castanets, guitar. […] ISABEL as CARMEN, in gypsy costume […] begins to dance […] a denial of what is happening in the bedroom downstairs” (24). By having Isabel become Carmen, Simons evokes the image of Isabel as “erotic, mysterious, jealous, passionate […] and ultimately doomed” (Plotkin 294). The issue of incest remains fairly ambiguous throughout the play. It is clear that Isabel feels she is losing her husband to her daughter, but instead of fighting to help either her husband or her daughter, Isabel recedes into her world of fantasy. Since the incest is never overtly depicted on stage, how a production chooses to read its ambiguity is important. As it is also one of the most theatrical moments, the handling of this scene was a major topic in our workshop.

The second scene, in which Simons uses dance as a metaphor for violence, comes near the end of the play. Judith has just confronted Mark about his adulterous affair and discovers that it is worse than she imagined: Mark has a six-year old daughter from another relationship. He says, “If you insist on a divorce, I’ll destroy you in the courts” and he “lays out bloody photos […] from the East Indian murder trial, they appear on the screens” (81). He also informs Judith that Isabel has gone back to Thomas because “she knows when she’s got it good” (82). The murder images remain on the screen throughout a scene with Thomas and Isabel until they are supplanted with images reinforcing Isabel’s fantasy life.
Isabel slowly, with the help of Iris, dresses in an "embroidered ball gown" while Thomas slips into "a goldbraid Napoleonic style jacket" (83):

THOMAS, smiling now and in period character, bows and offers Isabel his arm.

[...] She's swept up by her partner in dance. One by one, ISABEL's self fantasies replace most of the bloody screen images. [...] ISABEL in heavy medieval robes; ISABEL as Cleopatra; [...] as Joan of Arc; as Lady Macbeth... [...] Gradually the lights focus on... ISABEL alone, then the lights bleed into darkness until, as in 'black Czech theatre', only her jewelry, sequins on her costume, and finally...

Only ISABEL's red mouth, rouge and heavy eye makeup show under the lights.

Blackout. A woman's brief scream; a man's scream...

THOMAS: (A long cry) Waaaaaaste!

MARK: The facts are simple...

Lights up: The two sets of characters together as shown below.

MARK: The body was discovered at 7:45 AM.

THOMAS: She betrayed me.

MARK: There was no attempt to hide the evidence.

THOMAS: She told me she'd never leave me.

IRIS: I washed and prepared her.

THOMAS: I didn't mean to spill her.
IRIS: I insisted on it; she’s had enough men handle her in life (84).

We come to realize that the waste, to which Thomas refers, is Isabel’s final placement of her jewels as quoted earlier. Simons’ use of metaphor and theatricality for the most violent, harrowing scenes in the play reinforces the idea that it is up to the audience to make the final moral judgments. Since we do not see Thomas murder Isabel, there is an ambiguity surrounding whether or not her death was suicide or murder. This is also a highly theatrical moment in the script, and therefore, in the workshop we spent time discussing the playing and technical conception of this point in the play. The two most difficult scenes to stage in this text, aside from the myriad of simultaneous ones, are the most intellectually ambiguous. Simons strategically uses metaphor to further remove us from, and confuse us about, the truth. Since Miranda is an offstage presence, the audience must decide whether or not Thomas behaves sexually inappropriately towards her. As we watch her mother dance as a form of denial, we are both entertained and repulsed at the same time. Simons uses this metaphor as a device to encourage thought on behalf of the audience. She does not answer these questions, but rather, leaves them open-ended so that each audience member may take his or her own moral stance.

**Gender Roles**

Simons employs gender roles as a device for dealing with labeled identities such as mother, father and non-progenitor. They are far too complex to be passed off stereotypically as those that are persecuted or “brutish” (Kareda). The two mothers presented in this play are tied to their husbands through “economic dependence”, which
Iris sees as “obedience school until you die: a choke collar may be fancy but it still chokes” (56). Both Judith and Isabel stay at home to raise their kids, but for different reasons. Judith believes that it is “[b]etter to do [her] own social work […] so others won’t need to later” though she is mocked by Iris for spouting the “party-line” (56). Judith’s sentiments do raise a valid issue, yet Simons undercuts this validity by turning it into irony. By the end of the play, Judith has separated from Mark. In other words, by giving up her career in order to remain at home for her family, she ends up alienating herself and her husband. Had she continued with her career, perhaps she and Mark would have found a way through their problems, rather than turning away from each other. He would not have viewed her as a financial burden, but as an equal contributor to their economic well being. Instead of creating the equal partnership that she professes to have with Mark, Judith transfers all of her love and attention to her children. The real question is who pulled away first?

Isabel, on the other hand, hates her children. She views them as “[a]ccidental byproducts” of marriage (35). She is killed by her husband and the real tragedy is that she believes that she deserves it. Despite leaving Thomas, she goes back to him. Although she has learned that there are other ways to show love, specifically through her relationship with Iris, Thomas’ emotional command of her proves too much. This tragic co-dependency means that though she is admired for something she is very good at, being chameleon-like in her role of wife, she only transforms herself in order to mentally escape her life of abuse. As she witnesses her husband’s attention move from herself to
her daughter Miranda, instead of her protective instincts rising to shield Miranda from his abuse, she becomes jealous and spiteful towards her daughter.

There is also a difference in the male domination of their children. Mark believes that his kids will come looking for him if he leaves Judith, yet he battles with them over every request: "If I ask my kids to brush their teeth, they give me a debate" (68). Fundamentally, he lets them down as a father. He may provide monetary comforts, but he is not emotionally available to his family. He has pulled away from them and is frustrated that they no longer regard him as the hero of their lives. Judith is willing to give up her isolated West Vancouver home in order to make things easier for him, yet Mark refuses. The real question is whether or not Mark bought them a home so far removed in order to have them out of the way. Like his own father, Mark only comes alive when there are other people around to appreciate the show. His wife and children clearly do not qualify as an audience.

Thomas allows his children to belittle their mother. In his mind, Isabel is a bad influence on them. He spends his money on beautifying her through lavish costumes and jewelry. However, he regards her emotional capabilities and her intellect as negligible. In the rearing of the children, he demands complete control. While Thomas verbally shows the utmost respect to his deceased father, we come to learn that this respect was engendered out of fear, not out of love. His parents were abusive to him, he abuses his wife, and so the cycle continues. Isabel is not at all surprised when she admits to Iris that Miranda

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“laughed at [her]; then [...] slapped [her]” and claimed that “it was her turn to collect jewelry” (66).

As a bi-sexual, Iris resides in the liminal space between man and woman. Simons embodies this by having Iris cross over into scenes that she would otherwise not be a part of, nor present for. While she is the strongest feminist voice within the play, we are shown that her way is far from ideal. She claims that she will never settle down, nor have children. She defends Thomas, the man who murdered her friend, by saying that she’s “a lawyer [...] not a judge. [...] Men have looked after us for centuries. It’s our turn now” (85). Clearly, Simons intends the irony that comes with this line. Iris can look after herself monetarily, be totally self-reliant, yet her moral and ethical stances are often negatively depicted as when she defends her friend’s murderer. When Judith accuses her of not being able to “understand what it means to raise a family”, Iris insists she does, “that’s why [she] choose[s] not to reproduce” (56). She does not want to become financially or emotionally dependant on any man.

In her deconstruction of what could be regarded as stereotypes, Simons uses these very specific and ubiquitous gender roles to provide an ironic, dark undercurrent to this domestic drama. She allows her audience to empathize only up to a point.

**Transformative Masks**

“Lots of makeup, that’s it. Maybe they won’t notice it’s a mask floating over a void” (Simons, *Preparing* 32).
In Simons' play, we observe both the private and public masks of her characters. As they transform and transition from one to another, we see how Simons unmasks them. Through this deconstruction of the social mask, Simons seeks to engage the audience in consideration of their own mask-making. *Now you see it...* is a decidedly uncomfortable piece of theatre, but Simons does not write comfortable or easy plays. She intends to challenge the status quo, and through her deployment of the social mask, she does so.

Isabel Fletcher’s mask may be the most psychologically challenging, but its manifestation is the most overt. She dresses up in costumes and “becomes” the great women in history. Her transformation into other women is her form of denial, acting as a barrier between her emotional integrity and the physical abuse she suffers at the hands of her husband, and later, her daughter. Before marrying Thomas, Isabel was an actress. Therefore, her ability to transform is second nature to her. While she is able to live in the skin of a character, the reality is that her actual body has been demarcated as Thomas’ property. Isabel says, “[t]hey used to call lice ‘god’s pearls’, in the so-called Dark Ages; did you know that? My jewelry is richer. […] It’s imbedded in the skin. […] These are god’s kisses. More beautiful than rubies…emeralds…or diamonds […] He adorns me” (66). While Iris “guessed at this” (64), Isabel is so adept at her mask-wearing that until she chooses to unmask herself, her abusive situation remains secret.

Judith’s mask is that of social morality. It is the most subtle, and therefore, very hard to demarcate. Through her social conscience, she makes Mark “credible” (33). The rigidity
of this mask leaves Judith isolated and lonely. No one is able to live up to her ethical
code, and though she believes that she and Mark are ethically aligned, she comes to learn
the truth. Although she has emotionally broken away from her relationship with Mark,
she is unable to find the emotional and sexual fulfillment she deserves because,
ultimately, she must remain “respectable” (72). When she finally allows herself to relax
her exacting perfectionist standards however, she is not able to do it as ‘Judith’; instead
she splits herself into the third person. Within this moral boundary and the safety of
positioning herself as ‘she’ however, Judith is on the prowl:

In search of men at work [...] I, she and I [...] hide inside my body. [...] I admire
and hunger for theirs. [...] Muscled and energetic. [...] A mix of races [...] Their
supple, warm skin. She can smell them...smell and taste what they might be like
[...] That’s when she moves on. [...] We are respectable, she and I. (72)

Of all the characters, Judith is the most reluctant to change. She is apprehensive to divest
herself of the social and ethical mask of morality she wears.

Thomas’ mask is one of elegance and refinement. His veneer of civility hides a monster
within. On the surface, he leads the perfect life. He knows the right wines and what to
pair them with. He has a prestigious job as a surgeon and is well respected in his religious
circle. He is a golden boy who comes from the perfect family. He can wear the best
clothes and most expensive suits, but underneath it all he is a killer. More than any other
character in this play, Simons allows us to see the cracks in the smooth veneer. His
social mask literally crumbles before us. Simons moves us from envy of Thomas to
disgust. In this way, the device of the social mask is used to epitomize the cliché, ‘you
cannot judge a book by its cover’. Even Mark is dismayed to find that Thomas was not
raised “like a prince with polo shirts and caviar served to [him] by a valet” (69). In fact,
his first impression of Thomas was that he had “so much snot up [his] nose [that Mark
was] surprised [that Thomas does not] choke on it” (19). The mask that we are finally
left with in regard to Thomas is a paradoxical one. He is both wounded child and
murderer. In his final pleas to Isabel before her death, he begs her to “(Like a child)
Touch Tommy” (83). In his admission of guilt to Mark over the murder of his wife, he
claims that he “didn’t mean to spill Isabel” (84), a decidedly child-like verbiage. In the
end, however, he transfers the blame onto his victim. He questions “why she didn’t
fight” (87) to save her life.

Because of his multiple life roles, Mark’s mask is the hardest to identify. He can be
stripped naked physically, but never emotionally. He is all mask. He claims that there is
“nothing at [his] core but what [Judith] puts there” (47). Like his dad, he comes alive
around other people and in his professional dealings he is dynamic. Yet, pathologically,
he cannot be alone. While Judith is comfortable with, and desirous of, isolation, Mark
must be in constant contact with the outside world. His character is the most conflicted
and hypocritical. While Thomas’ mask of superiority is proven to be a lie by his
murderous actions, Mark actually believes his own humility. He lives his life trying one
tactic after another until he gets his way. This is most explicit when Judith threatens to
leave him. He moves between threats and pleas, and finally resorts to outright
viciousness in his attempt to keep his family together. The most challenging aspect of
Mark’s character is that ultimately he is the most charismatic and humorous character in the play. We must both love and loathe Mark, often within the same page of dialogue.

Iris’ mask is that of a radical feminist. She believes herself to be the new modern woman. Akin to her bi-sexuality, Iris can cross boundaries in this play that others cannot. In this way, Simons uses Iris’ sexuality as a strategic device to literally expose the embodiment of Iris’ dual nature. Like Mark, we often love and loathe Iris in the same moment. While we admire the fact that she believes that “[m]en have looked after [women long enough]. It’s our turn now” (85) to look after ourselves, the very idea that she would take Thomas as a client is disturbing. While we respect her decision not to have a family because the “dynamics would change” (29), we cannot help but think her ultimately doomed to a lonely life without emotional bond or familial gratification. Iris’ dual natures are reflected in the simultaneous scene structure of the play. This is how and why she is able to act as an omniscient presence in many of the scenes. She is also the enabler. She dresses Isabel in her costume at the end, repeating the role that she played in Isabel’s life as an actress. She enables Judith’s discovery of Mark’s infidelity. She acts as sounding board to Mark, and her sexual conquests are equal to his own. And in the end, she will defend Thomas in his murder trial.

Simons’ constant masking and unmasking of characters, transforming their moral and personal codes before our eyes, is a clever device that forces the audience members to take note of their own social masks. Once again, Simons’ strategy is intended to challenge her audience. Her play is uncomfortable. It is not easy or romantic. While the
characters resemble our friends and neighbors, it depicts the worst part of their personalities. These characters are the type of people that we hope we do not resemble. We do not want to see ourselves reflected back if they are the reflection offered. However, this is a strategy on the part of Simons. If we do identify, even in some small way, with the characters, it can be imagined that when we leave the theatre, we will make a concerted effort to change. Whether intentional or not, Simons' theatre is deeply political. It forces us to think critically about our own actions and judgments. Many of these personal and social issues, and Simons' intent in including them, came to the fore in our workshop of the play.

The Workshop
On February 19, 2005, Meta.for Theatre Society arranged for a day-long workshop of now you see it.... As well as the five actors, Tristan Ham, Leanne Koehn, James Rowley, Angela Ferreira and Cynnamon Schreinert, board members and friends were also invited to engage in the readings and subsequent discussions. The actors were provided with scripts a few weeks in advance of the reading, giving them time to prepare their roles and question some of the thematic issues and staging requirements of the text. Since we only had one day in which to breakdown and analyze the text as a group, I decided that the best use of time would be to do one full reading, including stage directions, followed by a discussion. A second reading, without stage directions followed, allowing the flow of the text to be examined without the technical interruptions. Our main objective was to see if the simultaneity of dialogue could function the way it was intended. Would the dialogue
become mere soundscape? If it indeed “barely works on the page,” could we avoid it “placing iron clamps around the creativity of both the actor and the director” (Kareda)?

The first question I posed for discussion is whether or not the characters and situations were real and logical to the world that Simons created. It was felt that the characters are real. In them, the actors and other workshop participants, ranging across many age groups, economic backgrounds and social strata, felt they could see their neighbors, colleagues, and loved ones. The characters resonated as real people. They were easily identifiable, as were their issues and personal complexities. It was felt that Simons emotionally strips her characters of their social masks, baring them to the audience in a way that the characters never bare themselves to each other. Fundamentally, we are shown that the prime similarity between humans is that we are all in search of love and acceptance.

The second question was concerned with the play’s structure and whether or not we could “see” how the dramaturgy was supposed to function. For this, we specifically looked at the simultaneity of dialogue and the two most violent scenes presented through metaphor. Of our listeners, a few found the dialogue easier to follow on the second reading of the text. It was felt that in the first reading, it took time to adjust to the unique delivery of dialogue. I believe that once this play is properly rehearsed for production, the simultaneous dialogue will become less of an issue. It will still take a period of adjustment, like a classical or foreign text, but, ultimately, a director guides an audience to what is most important in a text. Through blocking and the emphasis of certain key
lines, it will be relatively easy to follow the story. The actors did not seem to have a problem allowing for the counterpoint of another scene to interrupt their dialogue. In fact, upon hearing the line, the meaning created through dialogic juxtaposition becomes even more evident.

We spent the most time in discussion about the metaphorical staging of the violent scenes: Thomas’ incestuous relationship with Miranda, and Isabel’s death. While the group came to a consensus that Thomas was definitely abusing his daughter, whether or not he kills his wife or if she commits suicide remains ambiguous. In part, this is because the two issues are handled through different divisive strategies. We see Thomas take the costume and the gift offstage as he calls for Miranda. We watch Isabel dance to avoid “what is happening in the bedroom downstairs” (24). Through these actions, we can take the leap to definitive abuse. The murder is more complicated. Simons places a blackout just before we hear a “woman’s brief scream; a man’s scream” (84). After Isabel’s death, Judith is amazed that Iris can “sound proud […] that [Isabel] might have done violence to herself” (85). She goes on to say that perhaps “he did it to her. Either way, it was obscene; an obscene act of cooperation between the two of them” (85). Through Judith, Simons does not allow for a definitive reading of Isabel’s death. Simons constructs the death through unseen action and conflicted dialogue, reminding the audience that we never really know what happens in the privacy of homes other than our own.

For the next workshop of this play, I would like to have more time to work with the actors on these thematic and dramaturgical complexities. In providing a firmer direction,
actually stopping and working parts of the text, we will be able to further elucidate and examine the counterpoint of dialogue. The rhythm of this play is strict and must be handled like music.

*now you see it...* is dramaturgically structured like Mozart’s opera *Don Giovanni*. The rhythmic lyricism of the play’s dual scene structure carries the same poignancy and counterpoint of a duet. In the end, “even in the face of death” the characters do not see the errors of their ways and are metaphorically “dragged to hell” (Freeman). In both *now you see it...* and *Don Giovanni* “[t]he shifting scenes and action […] make it a real challenge for stage directors” (Plotkin 256). These factors have not prevented countless productions of *Don Giovanni* over the years. While *now you see it...* is challenging in both its dramaturgy and content, like *Don Giovanni*, “[p]art of the greatness […] is that it does not offer easy answers” for audience, actors or director (256).

Like *Don Giovanni*, *now you see it...* is “mysterious, universal, and ha[s] multiple meanings [depending on] each person who encounters” it (257). Since the play deals with intangible concepts like justice and truth, it is difficult to pin any “correct” response to the behaviors of Simons’ characters. “We can debate the implications suggested by its dramatic situations: Do we pay for our sins? Can sex without love be meaningful?” (257). Simons chooses to “present these characters and issues to us, but [she does] not offer an opinion about them” (257). She leaves that up to the audience.
IV. CONCLUSION

There is no question that the work of Beverley Rosen Simons is challenging. It may be difficult to understand for the average theatre patron. It may also be hard for some to find appeal in Simons’ theatrical style and edgy subject matter. However, I believe that theatre is meant to challenge us. If we want things to remain easy, we can turn on our television sets. Getting to the theatre is a challenge in its own right. Physically leaving the comfort of home, arranging transportation, purchasing tickets and making sure you are at the theatre before the show starts takes effort. For that effort, should the audience be rewarded with light, non-meaningful sentiment, or should it be challenged to face real issues like personal judgments and social contributions? This is a concept with which theatre companies grapple every time they create the next year’s program.

Simons is unapologetic in her challenge to the audience. I have shown that she offers her director and actors a difficult but coherent and tightly crafted script, a sense of the visual elements necessary to produce the play, and lines that include the movement and breath of life in their rhythm. It is up to the director and actors to properly interpret this offering in order to make it coherent and appealing for an audience. Many are unwilling to try. Therefore, Simons’ work has little hope of developing an audience wider than those who stumble across her out of intellectual curiosity.

At the end of her thesis, Raby suggests that maybe “it is not too late to persuade Simons to bring her talent back to the theatre” (291). Yet, Simons has been trying to find a professional production for now you see it... for over ten years. If she was already
discouraged and withdrawing from theatre when Raby wrote her thesis in 1982, this latest inattention may very well convince her to stop writing for the stage altogether. In my dramaturgical analysis of this uniquely demanding script, I have demonstrated that Simons’ complex theatricality and her integration of contemporary social issues into an essentially domestic drama make her a playwright of great ability and relevancy. I believe that theatre audiences will rise to fill the intellectual challenges that we demand from them. Coming out of the workshop, I am more convinced than ever that this play is deserving of a professional production.
WORKS CITED AND CONSULTED


---. *now you see it...* Unpublished play.


---. *The Theft.* Unpublished story.


