



J. GORDON SHILLINGFORD
P U B L I S H I N G I N C

BOOKS THAT ENTERTAIN, EDUCATE, AND INSPIRE

ESSENTIAL READING



“The script is taut, tense and full of nuance about race, sexuality, power and dignity.”

— *NOW Magazine*

“Two men reach out for each other in times of division and change in the intimate, tender, layered *The Seat Next to the King*.”

— *Life with More Cowbell*

“A cracking terrific play that delves into sexual politics at a time when it was dangerous to even talk about them.”

— *The Slotkin Letter*

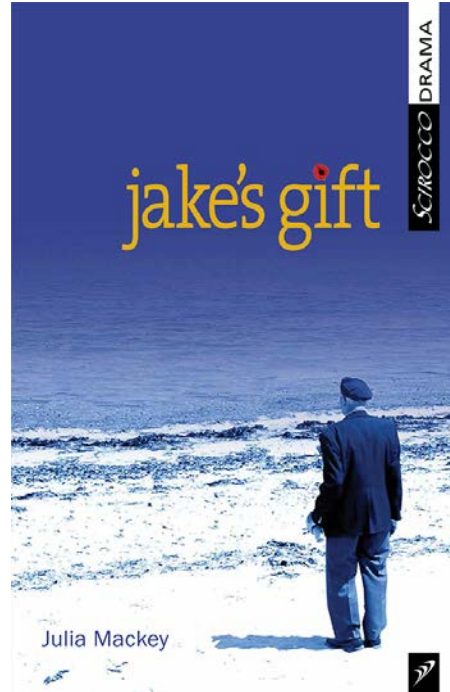
November’s essential reading is [The Seat Next to the King](#) by Steven Elliott Jackson. Based on two influential political figures from the 1960s, the play examines homophobia and racism in that turbulent era.

In 1964, a white man walks into a public restroom in a Washington, DC park looking for sex. The next man who enters is a black man. In what seems at first to be a simple encounter, *The Seat Next to the King* explores the lives of two men from the pages of history who literally sat next to the most powerful men in America—Bayard Rustin, a friend to Martin Luther King Jr. who organized the March on Washington, and Walter Jenkins, top aide, and friend to President Lyndon Johnson. An exploration of sexuality, race, and masculinity, *The Seat Next to the King* imagines a meeting between two men, burdened by their prejudices and inner conflicts, as they attempt to find a connection.

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THE INTERVIEW

*[Jake's Gift](#) is a multi-award-winning Canadian play about a World War II veteran's reluctant return to Normandy, France, for the 60th anniversary of the D-Day landings. While revisiting the shores of Juno beach, Jake encounters Isabelle, a precocious ten-year-old from the local village. Isabelle's inquisitive nature and charm challenge the old soldier to confront some long-ignored ghosts — most notably the wartime death of his eldest brother, Chester, a once-promising young musician. At its heart, *Jake's Gift* is about the legacy of remembrance and makes personal the story behind one soldier's grave.*



Julia, *Jake's Gift* is a remarkable play that has been touring Canada and the world since you first wrote and performed it in 2007. You've toured to more than 250 cities, and you've performed in many of those places more than once! Why do you think that this story of a World War II veteran and a young girl has such resonance for audiences everywhere?

My partner Dirk and I are so lucky to have been touring *Jake's Gift* pretty steadily since 2007—until COVID arrived. Those touring experiences have been a magical way to see the country and beyond. We are amazed at the number of audience members who come back to see *Jake's Gift* multiple times bringing friends and/or family members. When I get a chance to speak to those people afterwards or via email they tell me how much the story resonates for them because Jake reminds them of their own dad or grandad or uncle or husband, and Isabelle of their granddaughter, daughter or niece. I remember meeting a charming war bride after one performance who said, "Where did you get my husband's pants?" We had a good laugh about that. I think Jake and Isabelle's friendship is reminiscent of a lot of grandparent/child relationships and perhaps when a story resonates for us personally it stays with us longer than we expect. Many patrons have also told me how much they want to share the story with other people, which is so heartwarming to me. I never imagined this play would still be a big part of our lives fifteen years after I wrote it. I'm closer to Jake's age now than Isabelle's! It is a joy to still have people asking us to bring the show to their community.

***Jake's Gift* brings history to life for its audiences and readers. Why do you feel that this is important, particularly for young people, who may not know any WWII veterans personally?**

I think sharing history through theatre is a magical and lasting way to connect us to our past, and to experience history that way is far more interesting than a classroom lecture or text book. I certainly never imagined that *Jake's Gift* would or could be a teaching tool. I just wanted to share a profoundly moving experience I had all those years ago in Normandy. I am always so moved by the number of young people I meet who say how much they loved the story and that they never knew about D-Day or about how many young Canadians (many their own age or not much older) were buried overseas and whose service played a part in the freedoms they are experiencing today living in Canada. I'll never forget one young man I spoke to after a show one day. He was 21 years old and had never been to a Remembrance Day ceremony and never really thought much about taking time to reflect on the loss of war or sacrifice. On November 11th that year, he wrote to me and told me he had attended his very first Remembrance Day ceremony, and that he was thinking about Jake and all the young men and women his own age who never got to come home. I still think of that young man every year, and I don't think anyone could have a more satisfying experience as an artist to know that something you wrote compelled someone to action and that the story has stayed with them.

Who or what do you count among your playwriting inspirations?

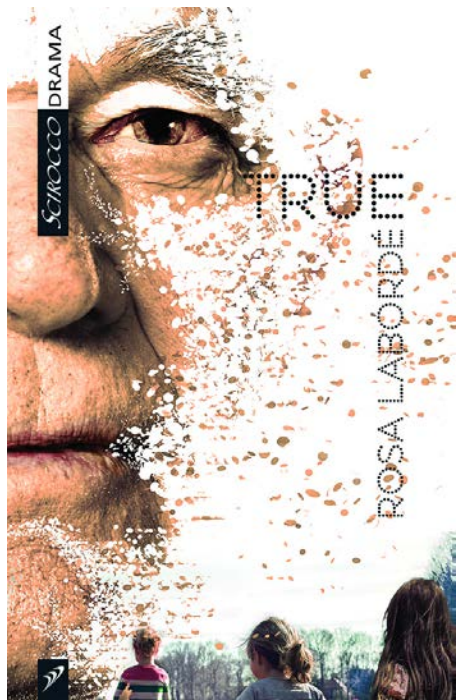
The playwrights who first got me interested in playwriting were Daniel MacIvor and Michael Healey. I remember being profoundly moved by *Here Lies Henry* and *Kicked* when I saw them back in Victoria in the 1990s when I first started playwriting and performing with Theatre SKAM. The plays and playwrights whose stories take their audience on an emotional rollercoaster inspire me the most. That mix of emotions for an audience is so true to our daily lives and being in a room full of people to go on that journey together is inspiring to me as an audience member and as a writer.

What is also inspiring to me is building a play around a real-life experience or moment. I think the honesty that comes from tapping into those moments we've already lived—or that someone else has—helps create a story that people will connect to.

[Read the Full Interview](#)

CLASS NOTES

Want to share your story about how you use JGS titles in your classes? Let us know. We'd love to talk to you!



Sisters Marie, Cece, and Anita run a small coffee-and-clothes shop on Toronto's trendy Queen Street West. One evening, their estranged father, Roy, wanders in, in his pyjamas. He is clutching a note explaining that he has Alzheimer's and admonishing his daughters for abandoning their parent in his time of need.

But it quickly becomes clear that Roy was a drunk and a philanderer—and perhaps worse. The women must decide whether his parental sins should be forgiven just because he has now forgotten them.

***True* was inspired in part by *King Lear*, and it is often studied in conjunction with that classic. Why is it important for students to experience contemporary “takes” on Shakespeare?**

Shakespeare is literary perfection, the writing is so intricate and precise and looks so deeply into the human condition that, of course, it stands alone and deserves to be explored exactly as it is. While *True* was inspired by aspects of *King Lear*, it is loose, and not what I would call an adaptation. Still, I'm a huge fan of contemporary takes on classics because we are continuously evolving the ways in which we receive and process information, and while Shakespeare's language spoke radically to its time, it can create a kind of distance or separation from the heart of the work for new audiences. Yet its themes are so profoundly current that the message being lost on account of how it's presented is a real shame. I know, for instance, that Baz Luhrmann's take on *Romeo and Juliet* did more for my generation's appreciation of Shakespeare than probably any English Lit class. The great thing about contemporary takes is that it doesn't end there, it's an entry point that leads new or reluctant audiences to a love of Shakespeare because they can see themselves in it. It stops being some old text with period costumes and an alienating vocal cadence and becomes very alive and very *now*, which has the paradoxical result of making us profoundly more understanding of how things were *then* and how cyclical and relatable the human experience is.

***True* is the only play programmed at the Rendezvous with Madness Festival that's taking place at the new Joseph Workman Theatre inside the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto. Can you tell us a bit about this festival?**

The Rendezvous with Madness Festival is the first and largest arts and mental health festival in the world. It uses art as the entry point to illuminate and investigate the realities and mythologies surrounding mental illness and addiction. This year felt especially poignant, as so many of us are feeling the emotional effects of months of isolation, income precarity, and anxiety over what the future holds, so being a part of the festival offered such a unique opportunity to come together in reflection and discussion. We also had the privilege of inaugurating a new space. The new Joseph Workman Theatre

has been built with two enormous walls of windows – there are curtains that black out the whole space for theatre and cinema showings but part of the reasoning behind the windows was to let light in, to stop keeping struggles with mental health and addiction in the dark, so we decided, in that spirit, to keep the windows visible throughout the production which, don't get me wrong, was a challenge for lighting, but such a worthwhile one, as we felt ourselves to be a tiny piece of the landscape of our beautiful city.

What are some of the themes you explore in *True*?

The most prominent theme is the nature of memory and how the way we recall events can shape our current reality. This is interwoven with dementia and memory loss, alcoholism and addiction recovery, the wounds that grief and trauma leave us with, and some quantum multi-verse theory thrown in for good measure. Music is also a big character in the piece. How it uplifts and unites, but also how a melody can bring us right back to a time or place in our past.

Many of our authors are available for classroom visits, in person or via Zoom. If there's an author you'd like to invite to your class, [contact us](#) for more information.

LEST WE FORGET



[See More](#)

COMING ATTRACTIONS

• IN THEATRES •

Miss Caledonia by Melody Johnson

[Thousand Island Playhouse](#), Gananoque, ON, November 4–28, 2021

Serving Elizabeth by Marcia Johnson

[Belfry Theatre](#), Victoria, BC, November 23–December 19, 2021

Daisy by Sean Devine

[Great Canadian Theatre Company](#), Ottawa, ON, November 30–December 17, 2021

The Runner by Christopher Morris

[Tarragon Theatre](#), Toronto, ON, January 2021
[Great Canadian Theatre Company](#), February 24–March 6, 2022
[Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre](#), March 31–April 16, 2022

Salt Baby by Falen Johnson
[Magnus Theatre](#), Thunder Bay, ON, January 27–February 12, 2022

Controlled Damage by Andrea Scott
[Grand Theatre](#), London, ON, February 22–March 6, 2022

Light by Rosa Labordé
[Tarragon Theatre](#), Toronto, ON, February–March 2022

Orphan Song by Sean Dixon
[Tarragon Theatre](#), Toronto, ON, March–April 2022

The Herd by Kenneth T. Williams
[Citadel Theatre](#), Edmonton, AB, April 2–April 24, 2022
[Tarragon Theatre](#), Toronto, ON, May–June 2022

• ONLINE •

Serving Elizabeth by Marcia Johnson
[Stratford Festival](#), Stratford, ON, October 28–November 28, 2021

Readings from ***Growing Up Dead*** and other work by Colleen Murphy
[University of Regina Playwrights Reading Series](#), Regina, SK, November 19, 2021

Reading of ***My Sister's Rage*** by Yolanda Bonnell
[Studio 180 Theatre](#), Toronto, ON, November 20, 2021

The Year of the Rat, including work by Rosa Labordé
[Factory Theatre](#), Toronto, ON, February 24–March 6, 2022

Deer Woman by Tara Beagan
[Prairie Theatre Exchange](#), April 20–24, 2022

Inose/Field Trip by Yolanda Bonnell
[University of Guelph Institute for Environmental Research](#), available now, indefinite run

PlayME dramas are now being broadcast on CBC Radio and Sirius XM. Scirocco plays such as *Prairie Nurse* (Marie Beath Badian), *The Runner* (Christopher Morris), *Vitals* (Rosamund Small), *Bed and Breakfast* (Mark Crawford), *Better Angels* (Andrea Scott), and *Lo (or Dear Mr. Wells)* (Rose Napoli) are available as PlayME dramas. You can also find PlayME plays on demand at: cbc.ca/playmeCBC

• ON THE BIG SCREEN •

The Swearing Jar by Kate Hewlett
Starring Kathleen Turner, Adelaide Clemons, and Patrick J. Adams
[Spring 2022 release](#)

IN THE NEWS

Congratulations to:

- **Falen Johnson**, whose play *Two Indians* has been shortlisted for the [2021 Governor General's Literary Award for Drama](#).
- **Marcia Johnson**, who has been awarded a [lifetime membership in the Playwrights Guild of Canada](#).
- **Yolanda Bonnell**, who won the [Playwrights Guild of Canada Drama Award for 2021](#) for her play *My Sister's Rage*.

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