

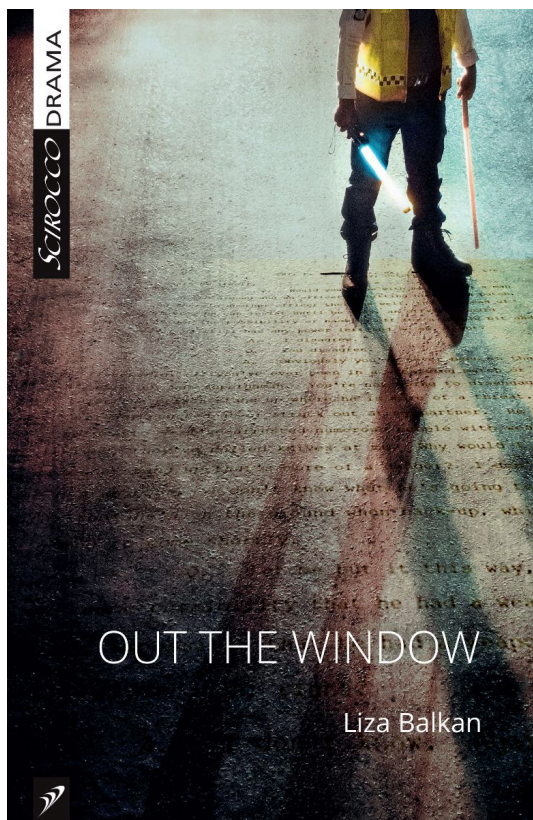
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J. GORDON SHILLINGFORD
P U B L I S H I N G I N C

BOOKS THAT ENTERTAIN, EDUCATE, AND INSPIRE

ESSENTIAL READING



“Incredibly powerful, edge-of-your-seat stuff... This is art that heals and transforms. It is art that connects our community.”

— *Mooney on Theatre*

“*Out the Window* has a raw, powerful quality that distinguishes it from other theatre: it will leave you with questions rather than answers... Balkan’s look at memory, making art, mental illness and police violence and the court system is essential for anyone interested in these issues.”

— *NOW magazine*

In the summer of 2000, [Liza Balkan](#) witnessed a man being beaten to death by police during an altercation in the west end of Toronto. This experience, and Balkan’s involvement in the ensuing legal process, was the catalyst for [Out the Window](#), a theatre piece that incorporates verbatim court transcripts as well as interviews with lawyers, officers, family

members of the deceased, activists and artists. *Out the Window* explores, through a variety of theatrical techniques, issues of policing and police violence, mental illness, racism, the justice system, witnessing, and memory. The book includes the script of the 2018 Luminato production as well as supplemental material that provides multiple viewpoints on the project's development and its community impact.

[See More](#)

THE INTERVIEW

[Kenneth T. Williams](#) is a Cree playwright from the George Gordon First Nation in the Treaty 4 territory. He's the first Indigenous person to earn an MFA in Playwriting and to become a professor at the University of Alberta's Department of Drama.

Ken's plays include [The Herd](#), which had a dual world premiere at the Citadel Theatre in Edmonton and Tarragon Theatre in 2021; Gabriel Dumont's Wild West Show (National Arts Centre), [In Care](#) (Gordon Tootosis Nīkānīwin Theatre), [Café Daughter](#) (Gwaandak Theatre, Workshop West Playwrights Theatre, Blyth Festival), [Gordon Winter](#) (Persephone), [Thunderstick](#) (Persephone/Theatre Network), [Bannock Republic](#) (GTNT/Persephone), and Three Little Birds (Workshop West Playwrights Theatre).



Ken, you once jokingly described your career path as “a guidance counsellor’s nightmare.” Can you tell us a bit about your path to the theatre? When did you know that you wanted to be a playwright?

Yeah, well, that's the funny part. I was not a theatre kid. I did not like theatre in high school.

I didn't take any theatre classes in high school. I thought it was silly, to be honest; I thought it was meaningless and stupid. I had wanted to be a writer since I was in high school, so my initial intention going to university was to get into the University of Alberta, into the Creative Writing program that they have here in the Department of English. But I'd never really finished anything worthwhile. I had a lot of short stories that were crap, and they all just ended because I didn't know how to end them. But then a friend of mine said, "Why don't you take a playwriting class?" I said, "Why?" He goes, "Well, because you don't need to know anything about it. It's an introduction. You're looking for a minor, maybe this will fulfill a drama minor requirement." So I did, and...you know, those moments in your life when something is revealed to you that you have to do, it becomes a quest item sort of thing? It was just that: "Oh, hey, I want to be a playwright! This type of writing speaks to me in ways I've never been spoken to before."

And I was finishing things, and I was having fun writing these things, but I had no clue. I had no theatre background. I'd never acted professionally, or even "amateurly." The last thing I'd done on stage was probably in Grade Five, where everyone has to be on stage, you know, one of those where you don't have a choice. Let's just say it evolved into me finding out I had to find out more about what I wanted to do. But in between that moment and where my playwriting started taking off or to where I became a professor... there were a lot of places I meandered to. I was a rock musician; I was a bartender; I was a part-time soldier in the Canadian Reserves. I was a door-to-door encyclopedia salesman! For real, I did that; I did it for maybe only two months, but I did do it. (I lasted longer than 90% of the people who took that job, I can guarantee you that.) And then I was a journalist, a communications person in the corporate world, stuff like that, before my career as a playwright started to move up. And then becoming a professor in the last seven years. You know, someone asked me, "How do you become a professor of drama?" This was not a plan. This is what a paramecium does: it finds different stimuli that it likes or doesn't like. That's how I got here.

***Café Daughter*, which was first performed in 2011, is one of your most produced plays. It tells the story of Lillian Dyck, a young Cree-Chinese woman growing up in Saskatchewan in the 40s and 50s, who went on to become a neuroscientist and later, a senator. The play was recently adapted into a film that won the Audience Choice award at the 2023 imagineNATIVE Film Festival. Why do you think this particular story resonates so strongly with audiences?**

I first started talking to Lillian Dyck way back in the 90s. We had a bit of a reunion in Regina when Globe Theatre did the play recently, and I said, "You know, we've been talking about this story for 25 years." We first had our connection when I was with the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation, (which is now Indspire,) and I moved to get her nominated for an achievement award for the 1999 National Aboriginal Achievement Awards. When I heard her story I thought, "Wow, this is something I haven't heard." And then I bumped into Keith Lock, who is a Chinese-Canadian filmmaker from Toronto, and I asked him if he'd ever heard of the conditions that Lillian was describing about how her parents met. (For those who don't know, at the time, Chinese businessmen weren't allowed to hire white women for their businesses in Saskatchewan.) He looked at me, and he said

no. And I figured if he doesn't know this about Chinese-Canadian history and a lot of people don't know it about First Nations history, then no one else knows—there's a story here that needs to be told. So I think that's part of it.

But the other thing is, as I was workshopping the script and trying to find the angle into the story, I realized that it was, at heart, the story of a young girl facing obstacles. A lot of my earlier stuff was me angry and telling people what to think and why they're wrong, you know, young guy, punk rocker, he thinks he's right all the time and you have to scream it at people. But I think that once Lillian's story sort of took off, I was just finding the story instead of creating the story. It's one of those odd times where the story becomes so powerful that it becomes a thing unto itself, and I'm just there to help it get on its feet, massage it a little bit here and there, and that's it.

Every time the play goes up, people respond to it. I think it's my most popular play in terms of audience response. It doesn't polarize the audience, like something like *Gordon Winter* does—people respond well to *Gordon Winter*, but they respond vehemently. You know, there's no middle ground. Whereas with this one, it hits the entire audience the same way, because I think they see themselves in that little kid on stage. Audiences see the story through the eyes of a child and then a young woman, facing these obstacles that weren't her decision, aren't of her making. They're things she has to face. And I think people respond to that no matter what.

You often explore complex issues from a number of different viewpoints. In *The Herd*, for example, the birth of white twin buffalo calves means something different to each of the characters, and as you say, *Gordon Winter* was about a controversial character. How easy is it for you to get into the minds of characters who have points of view that may clash with your own?

That comes from the evolution of my writing, and how I was able to recognize one of the weaknesses in my earlier writing. In the early, early stuff that has never been seen there was often an obvious negative or bad character that I wanted everyone to boo and hiss. Like, “Oh my God, look at them!” And as I was writing more, I started realizing that audiences don't respond well to a character like that unless it's purposely supposed to be melodramatic or funny. I started to look at: How do I get inside a character? And one of the things I teach students is to always, always look at your character making decisions that are the best decisions they can make based on what they know. No one makes a bad decision purposely, right? So when you look at it that way, when you understand your character's worldview, you can see why they think this is a good decision, why they think they're doing right.

And it got all reinforced at one point later on in my career in discussions with Colleen Murphy, who absolutely loves the tragic story form. And that doesn't necessarily mean, you know, the good guy loses. What it means is that everyone has a has a cogent, equally powerful point of view, and then they're all trying to make that point of view part of their life but they are in conflict with each other. That way you don't have victims on stage, you don't you don't have the bad guy who audiences are supposed to hate. For me, it came from

that, the evolving idea that your character's point of view makes sense to them, so you have to make it make sense to your audience. So that the audience doesn't go, "Wow, that was stupid." Once an audience member does that—particularly in bad horror movies or bad mysteries—once they think, "That was stupid," then you've lost them. They're lost.

[Read the Full Interview](#)

APRIL 23 IS WORLD BOOK DAY



At J. Gordon Shillingford Publishing, we're getting ready to celebrate World Book Day, which takes place every year on April 23. [World Book Day was created by UNESCO](#) in 1995 as a worldwide celebration of books and reading, and it is now marked in over 100 countries around the globe.

World Book Day celebrates the importance of reading and promotes a love of literature, but it also undertakes to shine a light on various issues affecting authors, publishers, booksellers and libraries. Copyright is a major issue in the world of books and writing, so in many parts of the world, this day is known as "World Book and Copyright Day."

April 23rd was chosen as the date to mark World Book Day because it is the death and birth anniversary of William Shakespeare. The date also coincides with the death anniversary of Miguel de Cervantes in 1926, and on that date Spaniards often exchange books. Various events take place on World Book Day, and each year a city is chosen as "[World Book Capital](#)" and tasked with maintaining the momentum of the celebration until the following April 23.

A UNESCO statement about World Book Day reads: “This day pays tribute to books and authors and promotes access to reading for as many people as possible. Transcending physical boundaries, the book represents one of the most beautiful inventions for sharing ideas and embodies an effective tool for fighting poverty and building sustainable peace... UNESCO cordially invites you to join in this celebration and to place books as a vector of knowledge, mutual understanding and the opening of the world to diversity.”

IN THE NEWS

- Congratulations to Adam Meisner, whose play [For Both Resting and Breeding](#) has been nominated for a 2024 Lambda Award in the LGBTQ+ Drama category! Winners will be announced at a gala on June 11 in NYC. You can find out more about the Lammys [here](#).
- The film version of *With Love and a Major Organ* by Julia Lederer won Best Feature at the [Canadian Film Festival](#). Congratulations to Julia and team!
- Jani Lauzon delivered [Canada's 2024 message in honour of World Theatre Day](#). Jani was also recently named the [Cayle Chernin Woman of the Year](#) by Equity Showcase. *1939* by Jani Lauzon and Kaitlyn Riordan is an upcoming Scirocco Drama title, due for release this fall.
- Two Scirocco Drama playwrights have been nominated for the Merritt Award for Outstanding New Nova Scotia Play: Daniel MacIvor for *Let's Run Away*, and Catherine Banks for *Downed Hearts*. *Downed Hearts* was also nominated for Outstanding Production and several other awards. Mark Crawford's *New Canadian Curling Club* also picked up several nominations. Congratulations to all the nominees!
- Tracey Erin Smith has been nominated for a [Canadian Screen Award](#) as Best Host, Lifestyle for *Drag Heals*. The show uses Tracey's unique SOULO method. Her book, *Flying SOULO*, will be released by J. Gordon Shillingford this fall.
- The University of Alberta is currently inviting submissions for the [Lee Playwriting Prize](#) and the [Lee Playwright-in-Residence](#).

COMING ATTRACTIONS

• IN THEATRES •

Mad Madge by Rose Napoli
[Nightwood Theatre](#), Toronto, ON, April 9–21, 2024.

The Comeback by Trish Cooper and Sam Vint
[Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre](#), Winnipeg, MB, April 24–May 18, 2024.

Greensleep by Kelley Jo Burke
[Dancing Sky Theatre](#), Meacham, SK, April 26–May 12, 2024.

The Outside Inn by Sharon Bajer and Elio Zarrillo
[Prairie Theatre Exchange](#), Winnipeg, MB, May 7–19, 2024.

The Birds and the Bees by Mark Crawford
[Alberta Theatre Projects](#), Calgary, AB, May 7–May 25, 2024.

Age Is a Feeling by Haley McGee
[Soulpepper Theatre](#), May 29–June 16, 2024.

Doris and Ivy in the Home by Norm Foster
[St. Jacob's Country Playhouse](#), St. Jacob's ON, June 19–July 6, 2024.

They're Found in Trees by Norm Foster
[Port Stanley Theatre Festival](#), Port Stanley, ON, June 19–July 13, 2024.

Saving Graceland by Gil Garratt
[Blyth Festival](#), Blyth, ON, June 19–August 3, 2024.

The Mountain and the Valley by Catherine Banks
[Two Planks and a Passion Theatre](#), Canning, NS, June 26–August 11, 2024.

Onion Skins and Peach Fuzz by Alison Lawrence
[4th Line Theatre](#), Millbrook, ON, July 1–20, 2024.

Halfway There by Norm Foster
[Drayton Festival Theatre](#), Drayton, ON, July 3–21, 2024.

Salesman in China by Leanna Brodie and Jovanni Sy
[Stratford Festival](#), Stratford, ON, August 3–October 26.

The Golden Anniversaries by Mark Crawford
[Blyth Festival](#), Blyth, ON, July 4–August 4, 2024.

Those Movies by Norm Foster
[Foster Festival](#), St. Catharines, ON, July 4–14, 2024.

Doris and Ivy in the Home by Norm Foster
[Huron County Playhouse](#), Grand Bend, ON, July 11–28, 2024.

Hurry Hard by Kristen Da Silva

[Port Stanley Theatre Festival](#), Port Stanley, ON, July 17–August 3, 2024.

Get That Hope by Andrea Scott

[Stratford Festival](#), Stratford, ON, July 21–September 28, 2024.

Whit's End by Norm Foster

[Foster Festival](#), St. Catharines, ON, July 25–August 4, 2024.

Jim Watts, Girl Reporter by Beverley Cooper

[4th Line Theatre](#), Millbrook, ON, July 30–August 24, 2024.

The Trials of Maggie Pollock by Beverley Cooper

[Blyth Festival](#), Blyth, ON, July 31–August 29, 2024.

The Diviners by Vern Thiessen with Yvette Nolan

[Stratford Festival](#), Stratford, ON, August 7–October 2, 2024.

Onion Skins and Peach Fuzz by Alison Lawrence

[Blyth Festival](#), Blyth, ON, August 14–September 7, 2024.

The Melville Boys by Norm Foster

[Foster Festival](#), St. Catharines, ON, August 15–25, 2024.

Lakefront by Norm Foster

[Lighthouse Theatre](#), Port Dover, August 21–September 7, 2024.

Lakefront by Norm Foster

[Lighthouse Theatre](#), Port Colborne, September 11–September 22, 2024.

1939 by Jani Lauzon and Kaitlyn Riordan

[Canadian Stage](#), Toronto, ON, September 15–October 6, 2024.

Bed and Breakfast by Mark Crawford

[Prairie Theatre Exchange](#), Winnipeg, MB, September 24–October 6, 2024.

The Anger in Ernest and Ernestine by Robert Morgan, Martha Ross, and Leah Cherniak

[Great Canadian Theatre Company](#), Ottawa, ON, September 24–October 6, 2024.

Jonas and Barry in the Home by Norm Foster

[Theatre Aquarius](#), Hamilton, ON, September 27–October 14, 2024.

The Recipe by Armin Wiebe

[Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre](#), Winnipeg, MB, November 6–23, 2024.

A Christmas Carol by David van Belle

[Citadel Theatre](#), Edmonton, AB, November 23–December 24, 2024.

A Christmas Carol by Geoffrey Simon Brown
[Theatre Calgary](#), November 29–December 29, 2024.

Controlled Damage by Andrea Scott
[Neptune Theatre](#), Halifax, NS, January 14–February 2, 2025.

The Secret to Good Tea by Rosanna Deerchild
[Grand Theatre](#), London, ON, February 18–March 8, 2025.

The New Canadian Curling Club by Mark Crawford
[Neptune Theatre](#), Halifax, NS, February 25–March 23, 2025.

Bed and Breakfast by Mark Crawford
[Theatre Orangeville](#), Orangeville, ON, March 13–30, 2025.

Casey and Diana by Nick Green
[Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre](#), Winnipeg, MB, March 19–April 12, 2025.

Casey and Diana by Nick Green
[Neptune Theatre](#), Halifax, NS, April 22–May 18, 2025.

Casey and Diana by Nick Green
[Arts Club Theatre](#), Vancouver, BC, April 24–May 25, 2025.

I'm in Love with Your Sister by Norm Foster
[Theatre Orangeville](#), Orangeville, ON, May 1–18, 2025.

• ONLINE •

A Time to Dream, a documentary about the extraordinary women of the CASA project.
[Playwrights Guild of Canada](#) production, available online now.

Inose/Field Trip, a sound walk created by Yolanda Bonnell in partnership with Dr. Jesse Popp that encourages participants to connect with the natural world.
[Common Boots Theatre](#). (A video ASL version of *Inose/Field Trip* is now available.)

Buffy, a five-part podcast about Buffy Sainte-Marie by Falen Johnson.
[CBC Listen](#). All episodes online now.

• ON SCREEN •

Les Filles du Roi by Corey Payette and Julie McIsaac
Premiered at the Rhode Island International Film Festival, with screenings at the Vancouver International Film Festival, the Hamilton Film Festival, the St. Louis

International Film Festival, the Orlando Film Festival, and others.

[With Love and a Major Organ](#) by Julia Lederer

Starring Anna Maguire, Hamza Haq, and Veena Sood. Finalist for the Grand Jury Prize, 2023 Nashville Film Festival, winner Best Feature Film, Reelworld Film Festival, winner, Best Feature, Canadian Film Festival.

[The Swearing Jar](#) by Kate Hewlett

Starring Adelaide Clemens, Douglas Smith, Patrick J. Adams, and Kathleen Turner. Now available to buy or rent on various streaming services including Apple TV and Digital TIFF Bell Lightbox.

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