

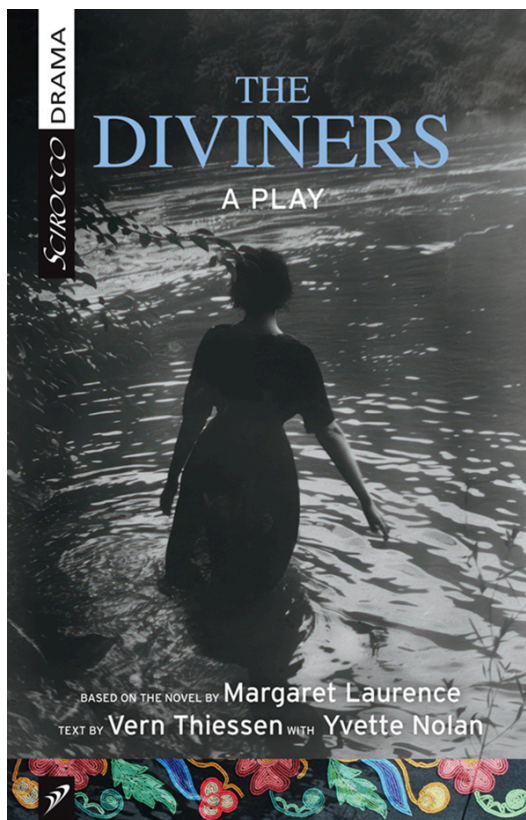
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J. GORDON SHILLINGFORD
P U B L I S H I N G I N C

BOOKS THAT ENTERTAIN, EDUCATE, AND INSPIRE

ESSENTIAL READING



“Moments that feel so inspired and new...ambitious... They don't shy away from the story's grittier aspects... Thiessen and Nolan also gracefully illustrate Morag's relationships with the people who have entered and exited her life.”

— *Toronto Star*

“A brilliant distillation of Laurence's masterwork.”

— *Stratford Beacon Herald*

“Speaks to us about relationships and the human condition in some of the most thought-provoking and meaningful ways.”

— *Our Theatre Voice*

Considered a masterpiece of Canadian literature, Margaret Laurence's [The Diviners](#) is the compelling story of Morag Gunn, a woman who perseveres through challenge after challenge as she attempts to carve out an authentic life as a writer. The play moves backward and forward through time, taking us to Morag's impoverished childhood in rural

Manitoba, her early struggles to establish herself as a female artist, and her present, as she works to finish a novel while navigating a thorny relationship with her teenage daughter, Pique. Inextricably bound with Morag's Scottish settler story is the Metis story of Jules Tonnerre, her friend, lover, and Pique's father. Adapted for the stage by [Vern Thiessen](#) with [Yvette Nolan](#), *The Diviners* illuminates issues of identity, class, and reconciliation.

[See More](#)

THE INTERVIEW

[Natalie Meisner](#) is a professor, a playwright, a poet, a mom, and now a podcast host (not necessarily in that order). She was born on the Mi'kma'ki/South Shore of Nova Scotia where she began her curious life by reading, with wild abandon, all the books that came through in the town bookmobile. She has seven full-length books in various genres to her name, was Calgary/Mohkinstsis's fifth Poet Laureate, and teaches creative writing at Mount Royal University where she loves helping other writers find their voice.



Natalie, we recently published your play *Boom Baby*, about a young woman working in the oilfields who becomes unexpectedly pregnant. Can you tell us more about the play?

Thank you! I am thrilled to have this play, a Canadian National Playwriting Competition and Alberta Playwriting Competition winner, published by Scirocco. *Boom Baby* tells the story of Iona, one young hard-working woman who is in the middle of trying to provide for herself and to survive and thrive in a work environment that is challenging for women. She is far from home and without many supports. When she becomes pregnant after sex with a

friend that was more about comfort and human contact than romance, her fate hangs in the balance. Iona contemplates all her options, such as making the arduous trip back to the city to end the pregnancy, adopting the baby to a couple who work in management for the company that employs her, or finding a way to raise the child herself. When the couple offers to pay her for surrogate services, she ends up asking herself—and the play also wants to ask—if there is any limit in terms of what can be bought and sold when it comes to the next generation. In a work camp environment, everything has a dollar value, and I wanted to push this logic to the limit to see what, if any, solutions human creativity could provide. Everyone needs to make a living and no one should be shamed for working to provide for their family, but what is the price of that work and who benefits? In *Boom Baby* we see the big, generational story made personal in the lives of Iona, her compatriots and her unborn child. We also meet the Albertans who are higher up the chain and benefit more fulsomely from the industry. What I wanted to do in this piece was to take this big issue of extraction and who benefits/who pays the costs and make it personal by telling it through the lives of working people, like the ones who raised me and whom I grew up with.

How did the idea present itself to you? Did you begin with Iona's story? Or did the themes give rise to the plot and characters?

I grew up in a fishing family in SW Nova Scotia/the Mi'kma'ki, where in the space of two generations, small-scale sustainable single boat fishers have been displaced by huge ocean draggers that tear the sea bottom and send profits overseas. In each generation we have lost family to the sea as they venture further offshore in worse conditions to make ends meet. Many also traveled to the west coast or to the north to work in mining. When I, too, found myself in Alberta for work, I began to take note of some of the similarities between fishing and mining, particularly in the lives and families of the people working in those tough industries. Both relate to the “tragedy of the commons” idea outlined by William Foster Lloyd and then reintroduced by Garret Hardin, that looks at how individuals or companies, when given access to a shared resource will tend to overuse it, eventually destroying it for everyone. Then it struck me how many of the issues I had seen playing out in the fishery were also happening in oil extraction. The environmental devastation, how extractive practices are practiced upon the earth but also upon the human beings struggling to survive and thrive upon her.

The first inspiration for this play came as two images: the green /blue tributaries of the Athabasca River that provide the watershed for the continent... and an unborn child floating peacefully in the watery world of the womb. The images flickered in my mind's eye, then became one. Then the characters (inspired by family, friends and loved ones) began to speak, each of them with their own valid and differing point of view and I knew I had to follow this play wherever it took me. When I wrote the first notes for this piece, I didn't have children of my own and now I do, which brings the question of what we leave to the future even closer to home.

BEHIND THE SCENES



This month we spoke to [Dave Carley](#) about the 10-Minute Play Series that is a core element of the annual [Port Hope Arts Festival](#) (PHAF).

Port Hope (population 17,000) is located at the mouth of the Ganaraska River, on the north shore of Lake Ontario.

Dave, can you give us an overview of the Port Hope Arts Festival? What happens in town when the festival is on?

Well, just about everything happens in town when the festival is on. It's a multi-faceted event—everything from people on stilts to art displays to a farmers' market, an artisans' market. And then there's the 10-Minute Play Series...

You've been the curator of the 10-Minute Play Series for the past five years, is that right?

Yes. Our first festival was in 2021. There was a brief moment when Covid lifted that summer, and we were scheduled on the most perfect day in the middle of the one or two weeks before the second wave suddenly hit us. People were just worshipping the actors and the plays and the whole event because they'd been cooped up so long. That was

pretty wonderful.

Tell us more about how plays are selected and produced.

Unlike the fringe festivals, we don't do a script call. We don't have a lottery. It really boils down to me, and whenever I stumble over a playwright, I ask them if they can give me a ten-minute play. That's about it. It's very random.

It's a good thing you know a lot of playwrights.

The best news is—they're everywhere! PHAF is a local festival, so about half of the shows are usually by area writers, and the rest are mostly Toronto playwrights.

Nice. And how do they get from page to stage?

After the plays are selected, this is where we poach the fringe model, because each show comes as a complete production to the venue that they've been assigned.

So you choose a playwright, then that playwright gets the personnel together and produces the show?

Yeah, pretty much. Another thing that's unique about it is that it's completely playwright-driven. I'm all about empowering writers. We have traditionally paid an honorarium per show, and that goes straight to the playwright so the playwright can dish it out. You know, if the playwright feels nice. Or they can just all go to the bar.

This not a fair question, but could you tell us about a couple of your favourite plays from the festival?

You might think there's only so much you can do in ten minutes—but actually, you can do an awful lot. What I've been finding is that the comedies, as you might expect, work very well. But more and more, I've been realizing that the serious plays work, too. Last summer, for example, we had a number of fairly serious-themed plays. One was by Marcia Johnson, titled *Another Word for Single*. It's a lovely little ten-minute play, very touching, about a man who is caught in a romance scam, and he refuses to listen to the warnings of his best friend. There's a little kick in the gut at the end of it, and the audience really, really felt it. You know, they all talked about it afterwards.

[Read the Full Interview](#)

HAPPY HOLIDAYS!



IN THE NEWS

Congratulations to Cairn A. Moore, whose new book [*Born Ready! An Actor's Handbook*](#) hit the McNally Robinson Bestseller list at #1 in the Paperback Non-Fiction category for the week of November 16–25!

The [Scirocco Drama Manitoba High School Playwriting Program](#) is back for its 26th year! Four Manitoba high school playwrights are selected for the program and paired with dramaturgs to embark on a play development process. Workshops and a public presentation of the plays in the spring of 2026 will feature actors from Manitoba Theatre for Young People's theatre school. The application deadline is Friday, January 9th, 2026—spread the word!

IN MEMORIAM

[Ian Ross](#) will be honoured at a community celebration of life on January 18, 2026, 2 p.m., at the [Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre](#) in Winnipeg. For further details or updates, check the Instagram account dedicated to honoring him, [@honoring_ian](#)

COMING ATTRACTIONS

• IN THEATRES •

Playing Shylock by Mark Leiren-Young

[Polonsky Shakespeare Center](#), NYC, NY, opens October 16, 2025.

Rogers vs. Rogers by Michael Healey

[Crow's Theatre](#), Toronto, ON, December 2, 2025–January 17, 2026.

Ruby and the Reindeer by Mark Crawford

[Here for Now Theatre](#), Stratford, ON, December 10–24, 2025.

Munsch Upon a Time by Debbie Patterson

[Prairie Theatre Exchange](#), Winnipeg, MB, December 19, 2025–January 3, 2026.

A Question of Character by Steven Elliott Jackson

[Aki Studio, Native Earth Performing Arts](#), Toronto, ON, January 17–25, 2026.

Mad Madge by Rose Napoli

[Neptune Theatre](#), Halifax, NS, January 20–February 8, 2026.

Boom X by Rick Miller

[Theatre Aquarius](#), Hamilton, ON, January 21–February 7, 2026.

Casey and Diana by Nick Green

[Western Canada Theatre](#), Kamloops, BC, January 22–February 1, 2026.

The Golden Anniversaries by Mark Crawford

[Arts Club Theatre](#), Vancouver, BC, January 22–February 15, 2026.

Holland by Trish Cooper

[Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre](#), Winnipeg, MB, February 4–21, 2026.

Rogers vs. Rogers by Michael Healey

[Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre](#), Winnipeg, MB, February 18–March 14, 2026.

The Cull by Michele Rimi and Michael St. John Smith

[New Stages](#), Peterborough, ON, February 26, 2025.

Queen Maeve by Judith Thompson

[Tarragon Theatre](#), Toronto, ON, March 3–29, 2026.

A Killing Snow by Paul Ciufo

[Vertigo Theatre](#), Calgary AB, March 14–April 12, 2026.

White Girls in Moccasins by Yolanda Bonnell

[Native Earth Performing Arts](#), Toronto, ON, March 22–April 12, 2026.

Chase the Ace by Mark Crawford

[Neptune Theatre](#), Halifax, NS, March 24–April 12, 2026.

The Golden Anniversaries by Mark Crawford

[Western Canada Theatre](#), Kamloops, BC, April 2–12, 2026.

On Native Land by Corey Payette

[The Cultch](#), Vancouver, BC, April 8–19, 2026.

Sugar Road by Kristen Da Silva

[Thousand Islands Playhouse](#), Gananoque, ON, May 22–June 14, 2026.

The Long Weekend by Norm Foster

[Port Stanley Theatre Festival](#), Port Stanley, ON, June 10–July 4, 2026.

Schoolhouse by Leanna Brodie

[4th Line Theatre](#), Millbrook, ON, June 30–July 25, 2026.

Sugar Road by Kristen Da Silva

[Port Stanley Theatre Festival](#), Port Stanley, ON, July 8–25, 2026.

Sexy Laundry by Michele Rimi

[Drayton Festival Theatre](#), Drayton ON, August 12–30, 2026.

Farley Mowat's And No Birds Sang by Dave Carley

[Capitol Theatre](#), Port Hope, ON, August 14–September 6, 2026.

Ship to Shore by Norm Foster

[Port Stanley Theatre Festival](#), Port Stanley, ON, August 19–September 5, 2026.

A Woman's Love List by Norm Foster

[Lighthouse Theatre](#), Port Dover, ON, August 26–September 12, 2026.

A Woman's Love List by Norm Foster

[Lighthouse Theatre](#), Port Colbourne, ON, September 16–27, 2026.

• ON SCREEN •

Starwalker by Corey Payette

Starring Dillan Chiblow, Jeffrey Follis, and Stewart Adam McKensy. The film version of *Starwalker* opened at the Inside Out Festival in Toronto in May and went on to play at the Vancouver Queer Film Festival; the Flickrs Rhode Island International Film Festival, where it won the Grand Prize Alternative Spirit Award; the Asinabka Film Festival in Ottawa; and the Portland Film Festival, where it was the opening night narrative feature film. The film version of *Starwalker* will play at the Whistler Film Festival in December

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. Available to rent or buy on Google Play, AppleTV or Amazon Prime.

[The Swearing Jar](#) by Kate Hewlett

Starring Adelaide Clemens, Douglas Smith, Patrick J. Adams, and Kathleen Turner. Now streaming on Amazon Prime.

[Café Daughter](#) by Kenneth T. Williams

Starring Violah Beauvais, Tom Lim, and Sera-Lys McArthur and is directed by Shelley Niro. Now streaming on Paramount+.

[Steel Toes](#) by David Gow (adapted from *Cherry Docs*)

Starring David Strathairn, Andrew W. Walker, and Marina Orsini. Directed by Mark Adam and David Gow. Now streaming on Amazon Prime.

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