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In Memoriam: Joyce Doolittle

Hélène Beauchamp

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In Memoriam: Joyce Doolittle

An actor, activist, and scholar, Joyce Doolittle was born on 5 April 1928 and passed away on 6 March 2020 while we were in the throes of editing this special issue. She produced some of English Canada's earliest academic writing on young people and the artists who create for, by, and with them.

From A Mirror of Our Dreams: Children and the Theatre in Canada (1979)—still the only comprehensive book of its kind in Canada—by Joyce Doolittle and Zina Barnieh with a chapter on theatre in Québec by Hélène Beauchamp: “It is time to re-evaluate and enlarge our concept of childhood... [and] the arts are essential to this process and theatre provides powerful and unique tools for this critical work” (24).

This call-to-action still resonates forty-one years later.

Joyce Doolittle and Hélène Beauchamp are two of Canada's founding mothers in terms of young people, performance and scholarship in Canada. With this special issue, we humbly follow in their footsteps. We are honoured that Beauchamp agreed to write this tribute.

—The Guest Editors, Sandra Chamberlain-Snider and Heather Fitzsimmons Frey



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Joyce loved life. She loved the people who surrounded her and had a wide circle of friends. She was passionate about theatre, and she made it her lifelong mission to ensure that as many people as possible had access to this art form. Very early on, she recognized the creative potential of theatre produced for and with young audiences.

Joyce reached out to me in 1976 or so, just as I was just beginning to measure the extent of what would give rise to the great adventure of creating a “new” theatre for children and young people, this social, artistic and political movement which had been at work in Europe since the early 1960s. Artists in Quebec and Canada were keeping a watchful eye on those theatre productions, which required specific skills and a great capacity to adapt to risk and invent new structures. This theatre was different in every respect, and we were thrilled.

Joyce would prove to be a very valuable colleague. She and I shared a common passion and worked together as two hubs—from Vancouver to Moncton by way of Calgary and Montreal—as we hoped to gain full cross-Canadian recognition of this “other” theatre (Figure 1). Together, we worked to highlight the vital connections between young people and artists, between theatre and pedagogical practices.

Joyce challenged me to contribute a piece to *A Mirror of Our Dreams: Children and the Theatre in Canada* (1979), a book which would officially establish theatre for young audiences as a field. Because she recognized the importance of international solidarity, she became a member of the International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People (ASSITEJ), which was founded in 1965. She traveled to Russia on several occasions to act as our representative and



Figure 1. Joyce Doolittle and Héléne Beauchamp, International Drama Education Research Symposium in Toronto, May 1989.

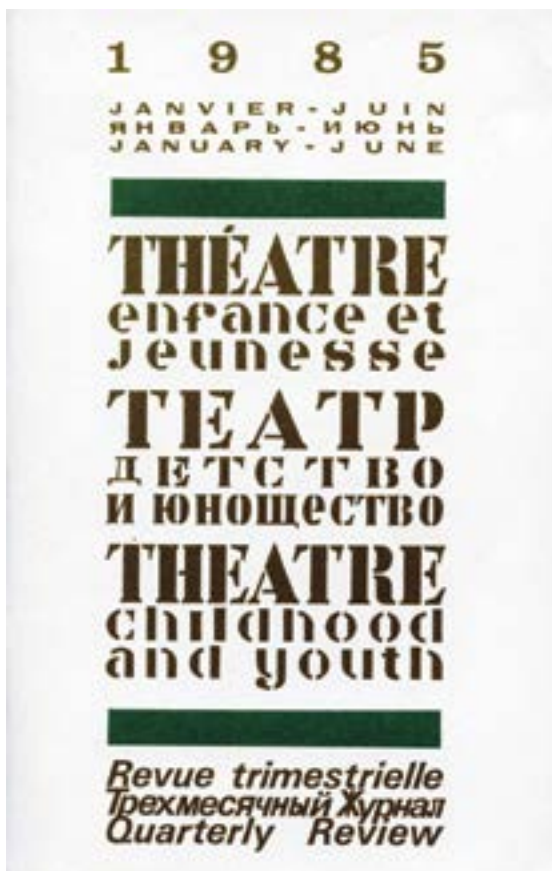


Figure 2. The special issue cover of the *Théâtre enfance jeunesse* published in 1985.

oversaw the foundation of ASSITEJ-Canada. As a result of her work, I was invited to attend the Association's international conference in Lyon as their keynote speaker in 1981.

Joyce then gave me another challenge. This time, I was to put together a special issue of ASSITEJ's journal on the challenges relating to children's theatre in Quebec and Canada (Figure 2). Published in 1985, it would include contributions in English and in French by first-rank artists such as Suzanne Lebeau, Dennis Foon, Brigitte Haentjens, Graham Whitehead, and Maureen Labonté.

Joyce was an exceptional colleague. She was generous, energetic and creative, and she had a great sense of humour. We often met at the Canadian Association for Theatre Research's annual conferences; I remember the one held in Calgary in 1994 during which I paid homage to her in a speech at a barbecue where impressive cuts of steak were served.

As my hair slowly but surely turned white, Joyce was always glad to remind me, as she smiled under her head of black hair: "You know, I don't dye my hair." As if I could ever forget! In friendship, Hélène.

Works Cited

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Contributor

HÉLÈNE BEAUCHAMP taught at the University of Ottawa from 1966 to 1975 and at Université du Québec à Montréal's École supérieure de théâtre until 2003. She has authored several important works on the history of theatre, artistic pedagogy, theatre for young audiences and the professional theatres of French-speaking Canada. In 2009, she received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Canadian Association for Theatre Research and was named professor emeritus at UQAM; in May of 2015, she was named an honorary member of the Société québécoise d'études théâtrales.