

Eulogy presented at the occasion of a memorial service in honour of Marlene Moser, Royal Botanical Gardens, January 4th, 2011. D. Fancy

These are challenging times.

We're here because we've all lost something—someone—, precious, remarkable.

Marlene herself wrote about moments such as today, about times such as the past couple of weeks. In a 2007 article entitled *Identities of Ambivalence* published in *Theatre Research In Canada*, Marlene explored how “Emotions can turn on a dime in the plays of Judith Thompson”. She noted that in texts such as *The CrackWalker* and *Lion in the Streets*, moments of intimacy are often cruelly interrupted. Moments full of potential come unnecessarily crashing down. Often, one person leaves, and the other person is left, wounded, sometimes thrown to the ground even, left to deal with what remains. Today, we are all that other character, that other person, left behind, thrown to the ground, empty.

The pain, the discomfort, the unsettling reality of loss that we're feeling is strong because those of us who knew and worked with Marlene gained much from knowing her, from being her friend, her colleague.

And *our* words, like those of the Canadian playwrights she followed so closely, and with such lucidity, have come pouring in to fill that void, to celebrate Marlene.

A former student of the Department of Dramatic Arts describes an important encounter: “I remember vividly my first class with Marlene (and one of my first university classes ever). She stood tall and elegant in her long black skirt and turtleneck, her hair was wild. I think the class was Drama Lit - she did not look up as we all entered and nervously found our seats but once we were all situated her gaze shifted upwards towards us and I will never forget the first words out of her mouth “You may address me as Marlene, Professor or Dr. Moser, at no point will you call me Ms, Miss or Mrs. Welcome to Dramatic Literature”. I was in awe and petrified all at the same time” says the former student.

Marlene's imposing and vital presence was felt by those who worked with her when she herself was a student. A former professor of hers at the Drama Centre at the University of Toronto explains that: “She was outstanding, a quiet leader in a class of talented people. Her wit, her creativity, her lovely moments of irreverence enlivened our classes every day. [...] She was for me a generous inspiring spirit from whom *I* learned a great deal”

Indeed, as a colleague and Grad school friend from the University Lethbridge reminds us, Marlene co-founded the Festival of Original Theatre at UofT with another colleague, now at Bishops, and also at that time began to make her mark as a young scholar at the meetings of the Association for Canadian Theatre Research (as it was then called). Says the colleague from Lethbridge: “1993 was the first of

many ACTR conferences Marlene and I attended together, sometimes as members of the executive, often as roommates in the student residence, and those experiences are my favourite memories – especially giggling and drinking wine through many banquet dinners”

Her reputation as a scholar grew over the years. A colleague from the University of Guelph notes the difficult reality that: “Marlene’s death silences the voice of a thoughtful, passionate champion of Canadian drama and theatre, particularly of work created by women. [...] Her prose was clear and confident, allowing the reader to follow the subtle turns of her arguments with ease. The arguments were not easy: often Marlene challenged her readers with her perspectives on works. “

Another colleague from Guelph indicates that: “A large part of the role she played for me was as one of a handful of people I imagined as a kind of ideal reader: she was just the kind of generous but rigorous interlocutor the very existence of whom made one's work better.”

This kind of generosity is also remarked upon by an intellectual who reminds us of the important fact that: “Marlene devoted a lot of her time as a scholar to reviewing, an activity which is crucial in advancing knowledge. Ironically, while crucial, reviewing the work of others tends to receive little kudos within the scholarly community. The body of scholarship evinces Marlene’s generous spirit, as a scholar and as a person.”

This generosity was matched with the courage to always make the most of the challenging circumstances of the past few years, such as the brilliant, passionate, and personal paper she gave at the CATR conference in 2007 on the marketing of pink ‘awareness’ products for breast cancer, or the work she began developing for creative and arts-based networking opportunities for women living with breast cancer.

Indeed, for Marlene, wherever critical analysis was to be found, creative activity was never far behind, and thus her essential contributions in terms of praxis: the relationship between theory and critical artistic practice. A Director of the Drama Centre at UofT notes that: “My scholarly relationship with Marlene, and my enormous respect for her, rests in her resolve not to allow her passionate love for the practice of theatre to become separated from her equally passionate love for the intellectual rigors of scholarly study.”

A former Dean of Humanities at Brock explains that: “Conversations about the department with Marlene, when she was Chair and when she wasn’t, were always joyfully and passionately animated. Her heart and mind intensely focused on what was needed to see ‘praxis’ realized.” A former Chair of the Department of Dramatic Arts at Brock puts it succinctly when she says, “Marlene was a breath of fresh air, the start of the renewal of the Department which you are all bringing to fruition”.

In order to help this vision endure, we are establishing a scholarship for students in her name, and are accepting contributions should any of you wish to make one.¹

And for us in the Department, those of us who must carry on without her, and yet carry forward the collective vision she helped inspire, we have much to be grateful for, and much to carry forward:

Memories of Marlene and Cece playing ‘duck duck goose’ together on the set of *Medea*, stories of adventures with cats, of Marlene developing with Philip the renovation plans for their house together, of delicious chocolate at Departmental retreats: all of these forming a rich and complex weave of reflection and creation, of art and of study, of colleagues and of family, of passion and of rigour. In other words, a life.

When she had finished a successful term as Chair, and was leaving to go on sabbatical, and all this a mere 18 months ago, we had a party in a garden for Marlene, and we read these words to her, words that I’ll finish with this afternoon:

“Marlene: you have inspired us with your tenacity and *sang froid* in dealing not simply with the slings and arrows that come with championing a theatre department to our senior administrators: you have inspired us not simply with your persistence in the onslaught of withering administrivia; but you have also inspired us with your ability to do all this and more with flair, precision and vitality all while dealing courageously with the vagaries of embodied life and the challenges of maintaining good health.”

We wish you very well, Marlene, and we love you.

¹ Please contact nbradshaw@brocku.ca for details about the Marlene Moser Memorial Scholarship.