



A #MeToo era look at consent and exploitation

Description

Sexual Misconduct of the Middle Classes gets high-class treatment at the Centaur

By **Byron Toben**

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Hanna Moscovitch's play ***Sexual Misconduct of the Middle Classes***, which won the 2021 Governor General's Award for English Language drama, was a hit, a very palpable hit, at its press opening at the Centaur theatre.

Directed by Centaur's Artistic Director **Eda Holmes**, it features versatile **Marcel Jeannin** as Jon, a writer and university lecturer, and ingénue **Inès Defossé** as Annie, an admiring student, as they drift into a sexual relationship.



Some comparisons to David Mamet's controversial 1992 play,

Oleanna, are inevitable, even to the names of John and the Anna part of the title (the girl there is Carol). To me, outside references seemed more to the comic strip *Little Orphan Annie*, which became a radio play and the 1977 hit musical *Annie*, as well as the 1992 and 2014 films thereof. In those versions, pre-teen Annie wore a red dress.

Here, the play opens with John noticing a neighbouring teenage girl walking nearby, clad in a red coat. This distracts him as he is operating a motorized lawn motor. They do chat, and it turns out that she is not only a student where he teaches but an admirer of his lectures. All this against a background where he is writing a novel based on his own experiences – thrice married and presently separated. Since he refers to himself in the third person while working on his script, it may take a while to realize this.

At one point, she is accidentally locked out of her house and is invited to wait in his until someone returns with a key. At another, a fall bruises her elbow and knee, wonderful moments as he gingerly applies bandages, trying not to touch her skin. I wasn't sure if this detail was in the script or a directorial touch, perhaps enhanced by intimacy coach **Luciana Burcheri**.

Against his constant fears that "this is wrong" and "don't do this," natural impulses prevail leading to kisses and more. Consensual sex, not forced, certainly persists until the end of the play, with a final breakup where she exits, presenting him with a large envelope which he reads as he throws away the pages. Legally trained me interpreted this as his being served with a misconduct lawsuit. Others felt it was her final paper which was either not good



enough after his special attention or too good, better than his own work.

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Seen again in the audience were **Maurice Podbrey**, the first artistic director of the Centaur and his wife **Elsa Bolam**, who started the Geordie Theatre.



Ms. Holmes has the ability to choose the perfect actors for shows she directs, for example, Andrew Shaver in the superb 2019 *39 Steps* and here, Mr. Jeannin, a veteran of the Stafford Ontario Shakespeare Festival as well as many shows in Canada, the USA and Europe, who was one of ten actors in the Centaur's fine 2020 *Paradise Lost*.

As for Ms. Defossé, a recent grad of the Conservatoire d'art dramatique de Montreal, this is a great calling card for future assignments.

Congratulations all around!

***Sexual Misconduct of the Middle Classes* continues at the Centaur until November 27.**

centaurtheatre.com

Images: Andrée Lanthier

Byron Toben, a past president of *The Montreal Press Club*, has been *WestmountMag.ca*'s theatre reviewer since July 2015. Previously, he wrote for since terminated web sites *Rover Arts* and *Charlebois Post*, print weekly *The Downtowner* and print monthly *The Senior Times*. He also is an expert consultant on U.S. work permits for Canadians.



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