



among men

a co-production with Theatre Projects Manitoba

Enrichment Guide

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Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre is proud to call Manitoba home. Royal MTC is located in Winnipeg on Treaty 1, the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree and Dakota people, and the National Homeland of the Red River Métis. We are thankful for the benefits sharing this land has afforded us, acknowledge the responsibilities of the Treaties, and embrace the opportunity to partner with Indigenous communities in the spirit of reconciliation and collaboration.

The Role of the Audience

Theatre needs its audience! We are happy to have you here. Every staff person, actor, and crew member backstage plays an important part in your experience, and you also have a role in the experience of cast, crew and the people around you.

Arrive Early: Please make sure you give yourself enough time to find your seat before the performance starts. Latecomers may not be admitted to a performance. We ask schools and other groups to arrive at least 20-30 minutes before the show.

Cell Phones and Other Electronic Devices: Please **turn off** your cell phone/mp3 player /gaming system/camera/smart watch. Texting, surfing, and gaming during performances is very distracting for the performers and other audience members. Using cameras and recording devices during a performance is **never** allowed.

Talking During the Performance: Even when you whisper, you can be heard by performers and people around you. Unless it is a relaxed performance, disruptive patrons will be removed from the theatre. Please wait until after the performance to share your words with others.

Food/Drinks: Food and outside drinks are not allowed in the theatre. When there is an intermission, snacks and drinks may be available for purchase. There is complimentary water in the lobby.

Dress: There is no dress code at the Royal MTC, but we respectfully ask you not to wear hats in the theatre. We strive to be a scent-free environment and thank all patrons for their cooperation.

Leaving During the Performance: If you leave the theatre during a performance, you will be readmitted at the discretion of Front of House staff. If readmitted, you may be placed in an empty seat at the back of the auditorium instead of your original seat.

Being Asked to Leave: The theatre staff has, and will exercise, the right to ask any member of the audience to leave if that person is being inappropriate or disruptive including (but not limited to): talking, using devices that produce light or sound, and deliberately interfering with an actor or the performance (tripping, throwing items on or near the stage, etc.).

Talkbacks: A short question and answer period with the actors takes place after student matinees, first Tuesday evening shows, and some public matinees. While watching the show, make a mental note of questions to ask the actors about the production or life in the theatre. Our artists deserve to be treated with respect! It's okay to have a negative opinion, but this is your chance to ask questions and understand the performance or process, not to criticize. If you have a concern, see the house manager after the show and they will make sure your feedback gets to the appropriate Royal MTC staff.

Enjoy the show: Laugh, cry, gasp – responding to the performance is part of the nature of theatre! As you get involved in the story, try to balance your reactions with respecting the people around you. The curtain call is part of the performance too – it gives you a chance to thank all the artists for their hard work with applause, and for them to thank you for your attention. We all appreciate when you stay at your seat and join in the applause!

Playwright Biography

David Yee is a mixed race (half Chinese, half Scottish) playwright and actor, born and raised in Toronto. He is the co-founding Artistic Director of fu-GEN Theatre Company, Canada's premiere professional Asian Canadian theatre company. A Dora Mavor Moore Award nominated actor and playwright, his work has been produced internationally and at home. He is a two-time Governor General's Literary Award nominee for his plays *lady in the red dress* and *carried away on the crest of a wave*, which won the award in 2015 along with the Carol Bolt Award in 2013. He has worked extensively in the Asian Canadian community as an artist and an advocate. In December 2023, Yee won the Simiovitch Prize, a celebration of Canadian theatre that represents the highest level of peer recognition in the profession.

You can find out more about David Yee on [his website](#).

See the entire creative team and cast for Royal MTC and TPM's production, including their biographies, [on our website](#) or by [reading our program online](#).

Characters

Milton Acorn (Milt)
Al Purdy (Al)

Content Overview

This section may contain spoilers.

Strong language; mature content including explicit conversations about sexuality, depiction of drinking alcohol and drunkenness onstage, cigarette smoking depicted. Brief mention of suicidal ideation.

Plot Summary

In 10 years, Al Purdy and Milton Acorn will become celebrated Canadian poets, but for now, they're just two broke men drinking whiskey and fighting with a wood-fire stove. The poets struggle to build an A-frame cottage while dismantling the narrow notion of 20th century masculinity and deconstructing the value of art, class, and friendship.

Synopsis

This section contains spoilers.

Al and Milt are drunk in Al's half-built A-frame cabin. They drunkenly discuss an erotic and confusing dream Milt has had set at a poetry reading, in which flowers explode from Milt's mouth as he goes to speak his poem. The story of the dream is continually interrupted as their minds drift into reflections on and critiques of an array of poets. Milt

asks Al what the dream means, to which Al refrains and goes to bed.

The next morning, Milt awakens Al by loudly reciting T.S. Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. After a tiff over retrieving the table saw for the cabin, Milt gives Al a letter from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) informing Al that his submission to write for the television series *Cannonball* has been rejected. Seeing Al's disheartened reaction, Milt begins rambling in an attempt to cheer him up and encourage him to laugh off the rejection. The two debate who in society holds the authority to judge artistic merit. Upon realizing that Milt will not admit his true feelings about Al's play when asked, Al storms off.

Later that evening, Al and Milt are drunk and on ladders placing the newly sawed rafters. They argue over Milt's carpentry skills and both end up getting injured, falling into a ruckus of drunken yelling, laughing, and bleeding. They collapse into a heap on the ground, smoking and reciting poetry to one another. After realizing that Milt forgot to bring the firewood inside causing it to be ruined by the snow, they begin rolling up newspapers to feed the fire. Meanwhile, Al recounts his tumultuous days of running a small taxi business with his wife Eurithe in Belleville. He tells Milt of the night he had lost nearly everything and let his last unseized car drive itself off a cliff into the lake, hoping it would lighten the weight he was feeling. It didn't, and he hitched his way to Toronto with no wife or business left for him in Belleville.

Al tries to convince Milt to burn the play from his CBC submission for the fire, but Milt vehemently refuses. They sort through their mail in search of kindling and find works of their poet peers, and debate whose poetry deserves to remain unscathed by the fire. Amidst the mail they find a newsletter informing them of an upcoming poetry conference at Queen's University. Milt is clearly interested and Al urges him to go. As he fights to convince Milt, Al confesses his belief that Milt is a better poet than him. Al soon falls asleep as Milt stares into the dark, smoking, thinking, and reciting William Stafford's "A Story That Could Be True" to himself as he drifts off to sleep.

Some more progress has been made on the A-frame. Milt recites some lines of his newest poem, provoking many critical remarks from Al. Milt adjusts and recites a new set of lines, impressing them both. As they prepare their breakfast, Milt explains the hierarchy of the different ways of cooking an egg, which leads to more debate between the men. Al remembers he must put the pole up for the hydro installation, so he attempts to blow through the limestone where the hole must go with a stick of dynamite. It doesn't work, so Milt helps him fill the hole with newspaper to further fuel the explosion. Milt recounts his childhood routine of walking home through the Irish neighbourhood of his town in an attempt to get beat up, as Al listens silently before they light the explosion. Milt freezes and is unable to cover his own ears, so Al rushes to cover them for him. However, the explosion still provokes a traumatic response in Milt.

Al holds Milt until he regains his calm. They sit together.

Some time later. The A-frame has come together a lot more but is still incomplete, with holes in the walls stuffed shut with newspaper. Milt stewes over whether or not to go to the Queen's conference happening the next day, to which Al calls Milt out. Al criticizes Milt about living in fear, and the way he hides behind his Marxist ideals to avoid taking risks and occupying spaces in which he doesn't think he belongs. Al relates to his fear by admitting that the night of the taxi cab incident he nearly killed himself. Al argues for Milt to go to the conference, and finally wins the argument by tossing the conference newsletter into the fire, to which Milt dives after it and grabs it out of the flames, proving how much the conference means to him. Milt acquiesces and they set out for Al to drive him to the highway to hitchhike his way there.

Al is alone in the A-frame in the middle of the night while Milt is en route to the conference. After waking up to stoke the fire, he notices a creaky floorboard and his step causes it to fall through the floor. An imagined Milt is in Al's head criticizing him with his superior carpentry expertise, Al quarrelling with him as he tries to cut a new floorboard. It falls clear through. Al comes back with another plank of wood, but it is once again too big. He gives up, throwing the plank into the fire along with the measuring tape, hammer, and nails. He ends up stapling newspaper over the hole, further covering it up with the rug and his armchair. He goes back to sleep.

Milt returns home from the conference. He immediately discovers Al's armchair cover-up, and quickly solves the problem with the ease of a seasoned carpenter. Al tries to figure out why Milt is behaving so strangely as Milt tries to walk away and fix the cabin's header, talking about how he's meant to be a carpenter, not a poet. Al relentlessly gets in his way and shoves him back to make him talk, until Milt finally caves and recounts the conference. Milt describes the way nobody knew who he was amongst the crowd of scholarly poets clad in their college crested sweaters and Governor General's Awards. He reveals that Gwen MacEwen was there, but he hid from her behind a tree rather than talking to her. Al explains to Milt how he must look beyond the desire for adoration as a poet and simply write poems. Al senses that Milt has written a poem and pushes him to share it. Milt's poem "I Shout Love" explodes out of him. They sit silently, then return silently to the building of the house. End of play.

Context and Related Resources

History of the A-Frame

“Listening

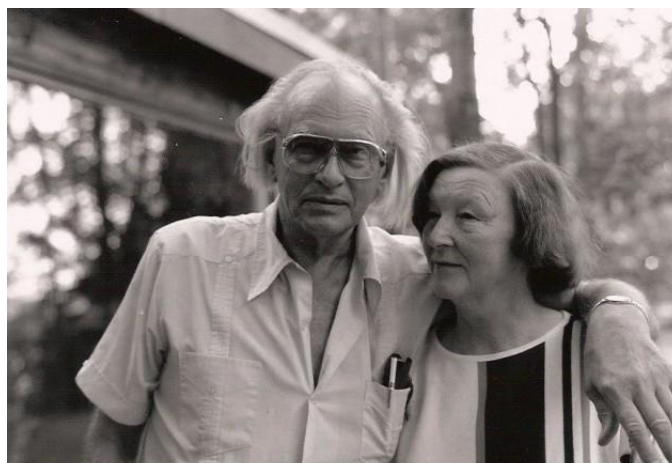
how the new house built with salvaged old lumber

bent a little in the wind and dreamt of the trees it came from”

- Al Purdy's *House Guest*



There are a wide variety of meeting places where artists convene to talk, create, and share. For Al Purdy and his peers, this meeting place was the A-Frame. On the south side of Roblin Lake, approximately a mile outside of Ameliasburgh, Prince Edward County, Ontario, stands a cabin with a rich history and promising future. After finding the plans for the cabin in an architecture magazine, Al and his wife Eurithe decided to buy a plot of land by the historic Roblin Lake Mill and build themselves a home from the ground up. Eurithe and her father Jim Parkhurst were the first to begin construction, which was soon followed by the aid of Al and his carpenter-turned-poet friend Milton Acorn. The cabin was built in 1957, out of which Al wrote for over 40 years, and even lived semi-permanently from 1957-1959 with Eurithe and their son during a period of financial struggle.



However, Al was not alone in his use of the A-frame as a place for natural and poetic sanctuary. The A-frame became a meeting place for several others, not only poets but all sorts of writers, painters, academics, journalists, and more. Margaret Atwood, Earle Birney, Margaret Laurence, George Bowering, and Michael Ondaatje are just a handful of the poets who travelled to the A-frame for a visit with Al and one another. Visitors would stay anywhere from an afternoon to a few days, drinking Al's homemade wine and discussing poetry. The A-frame became a significant meeting place for the modern generation of Canadian poets, and continues to serve as such to this day.



Margaret Laurence with Al Purdy at the A-frame. <https://www.alpurdy.ca/photos/>

As time passed, the A-frame began to show its age and faulty construction. However, Al's peers refused to let the historic cabin disappear into the past. After Al's passing in 2000, Eurithe imagined a future for the property as a writer's retreat. Determined to fulfil this dream, Al's former publisher Howard White and family friend Jean Baird founded the Al Purdy A-Frame Association. As a result of fundraising efforts and immense support from Al's community, the association was able to buy and rebuild the A-frame for a new generation of writers. The contractor selected to lead the restoration, Matti Kopamees, had quite a unique task ahead of him. It remained important throughout the entire process that not only the intentions of the original construction be respected, but that Al's poetry that spoke to the A-frame be engaged with and honoured by Kopamees and his team. Kopamees regards that, supposedly, the ceiling was made from an old box car, and that the panels on the back wall were from the old Belleville train station. They didn't have much, but what they built became so much more than just a cabin.

Beginning in 2014 with the inaugural resident poet Katherine Leyton, the A-frame is now home to a residency program for the next generation of Canadian writers and scholars.

Throughout the four-weeks, residents are expected to either host one public event (whether that be a reading, lecture, or otherwise) or complete a project that engages with the community surrounding the A-frame, in addition to their personal writing practice. Leyton's community project How Pedestrian had members of the community read the poems of Al Purdy, giving his words new life in the very place he wrote so many of them.

Related Resource Links: Explore the [website for The Al Purdy A-frame Residency](#) which includes statements from the architect and committee that keep it running, and see a [time-lapse video of an A-frame being built](#).

Al Purdy Biography

Born Alfred Wellington Purdy in 1918 in Wooler, Ontario, Al Purdy is regarded by many as the greatest Anglophone poet Canada has ever produced. Purdy was raised in Trenton, Ontario and received education at Albert College in Belleville, but dropped out at age seventeen to find work in Vancouver. He ended up working there for several years at a number of manual jobs before joining the Royal Canadian Air Force in 1939 to serve in World War II. Purdy was eventually demoted within the RCAF, after which he moved on to work as a casual labourer at a number of mattress factories in Ontario before settling in Ameliasburgh until the late 1950s. He wrote extensively about Ameliasburgh in his poetry, as this is also the town outside which he would build the famous A-frame at Roblin Lake.

The A-frame was built by Purdy and his wife Eurithe, with the help of Eurithe's father as well as, of course, fellow poet and retired carpenter Milton Acorn. Acorn's stay at the A-frame is recounted in Purdy's poem *House Guest*, which provides a glimpse into not only Acorn's personality but the combative, hilarious, and beautiful friendship the two poets shared. Al and Eurithe were married for thirty-nine years, and they shared a lot of love as well as some tumultuous times. "I spent half my life trying to escape her and the other half begging her to take me back," said Purdy. Despite their challenges, though, Eurithe is helping to keep his legacy alive to this day with her continual contributions to the Al Purdy A-Frame Association (see History Of The A-Frame section).

Purdy's lack of formal education may have affected how the more academic poets in his circle perceived him and his poetry, but he soon proved that this would in no way hinder his talents. The accessible content of his poetry, from hockey to drinking, as well as the colloquial language of his writing made him a real poet of the Canadian people, even earning him the title of "The Voice of the Land". The working class poet was evidently an outsider in the world of Canadian poetry in comparison to his university educated counterparts like Leonard Cohen, Louis Dudek, and Irving Layton, but his talent shone

through regardless of these educational hierarchies. Purdy would often do public readings of his poems, and his free-verse, conversational tone increased throughout his career. Additionally, Purdy's travels were a significant source of inspiration for his writing. Not only did he travel Canada extensively, but many accounts of his international travels are compiled in various collections of poems as well. Just a few of these collections include *North of Summer* (1967) from his travels in the Arctic, *Hiroshima Poems* (1972) from Japan, *Birdwatching at the Equator* (1982) from the Galapagos Islands, and *Wild Grape Wine* (1968) from a wide range of his travels. Purdy also wrote about the Indigenous peoples of Canada, and the most prominent example of which is his poem *Say The Names* (1999).

While it took a number of years for him to gain acclaim after his first collection of poetry, *The Enchanted Echo*, was published in 1944, Purdy would go on to have an eminent career as a poet. Publishing thirty-nine books of poetry, two memoirs, and four books of correspondence over his fifty-six year writing career, not including his posthumous works, his work was eventually celebrated with a number of prestigious awards. In 1965, Purdy was awarded the Governor General's Award for *The Cariboo Horses*, a book that Margaret Atwood called "a galvanizer for many people of that generation". Furthermore, he was awarded another Governor General's Award in 1986 for *The Collected Poems of Al Purdy*, the Order of Canada in 1982 for his career as a writer, and the People's Poet Award in 1987 for *Collected Poems, in memory of Milton Acorn*. In 2008, a statue of the poet was erected in his memory in Queen's Park in Toronto, after he passed from lung cancer in 2008.

Al Purdy may have been widely regarded as irritable and combative, yet his poetic genius and the community of artistic minds that he built at the A-frame cabin have made his legacy as a poet one that will not soon be forgotten. This legacy can perhaps best be encapsulated by the words of fellow Canadian poet Michael Ondaatje in his letter to Purdy after learning of his cancer. Ondaatje wrote, "You are the best and most important poet Canada has given the world. And the most enjoyable. And the least complacent. You brought your voice alongside poetry, and you changed it."

Related Resource Links: Visit the Twitter/X page for the statue of Al Purdy located in Queen's Park, Toronto. No one quite knows who runs this page, but it provides delightful imagined musings of the late poet as he sits perched in the park. @statueofalpurdy

Watch the 2015 documentary *Al Purdy Was Here*, directed by Brian D. Johnson, to gain more insight into Purdy's life, work, and the A-Frame fundraising campaign. It also contains many firsthand accounts of Purdy from his family, various peers, and other artists. The documentary can be accessed on AppleTV and [Kanopy](#) – free with your Winnipeg Public Library card. The soundtrack to the film, entitled *The Al Purdy Songbook*, is composed of songs inspired by Al Purdy written by various artists, as well as readings of some of his poems. Find it on Spotify, Apple Music, or [as a Youtube playlist](#).

Milton Acorn Biography

Born and raised in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island in 1923, Milton Acorn is considered a crucial figure in Canadian poetry. Similar to Purdy, Acorn was known to have quite the tough persona, a toughness that he says his father raised him to carry. Acorn was a carpenter by trade but was a self-taught poet from the time he was a young teen. He was able to support himself on disability pension after sustaining an injury from depth charges during World War II, after which he travelled across Canada working as a carpenter whilst continuing to write. In the early 1950s, Acorn decided to sell his carpentry tools to become a full-time poet, and his first collection of poems *In Love and Anger* was published in Montréal in 1956. A staunch and unapologetic socialist and champion of the working class, Acorn was an active member of the Labor-Progressive Party (LPP) in Montréal. However, while he maintained his socialist political philosophies throughout his entire life, he eventually left the LPP, as well as the city of Montréal, in the late 1950s to take his career elsewhere, leaving behind the stiffer philosophies of art that the party held.

Acorn's socialist ideologies and affection towards the working class significantly informed his poetry, particularly those for whom he was writing his poetry. When asked about his audience he said, "I decided to write for the people. For the human race. And since a majority of the human race is working class, I was writing mainly to them." This attitude towards his writing is in part why Acorn is often referred to as Canada's original People's Poet. After being passed over for the Governor General's Award for his first major collection *I've Tasted My Blood* (1969), Acorn was honoured with the People's Poet Award (also called the Canadian Poets' Award) in 1970 "which recognized his ability as a writer as well as his nationalist and activist stance". Acorn eventually gained further recognition for his poetry, receiving the prestigious Governor General's Award in 1976 for his collection of poems *The Island Means Minago* (1975).

Acorn's relationship with nature served as a primary inspiration for his poetry. A few selected poems that demonstrate this connection to nature include "The Island" from *The Island Means Minago* (1975), "Hummingbird" from *Dig Up My Heart: Selected Poems 1952-83* (1983), and one of his best known poems, "Live With Me On Earth Under the Invisible Daylight Moon" also from the *Dig Up My Heart* collection. Another example of his investment in his natural environment, as well as the ways in which he and his work did not fit into the traditionally accepted ways of being a poet, can be found in his concept of the Jackpine sonnet. His idiosyncratic sonnet form employed irregular verses, unrestricted length, and an overall freedom not previously known in sonnet structures. "I have named it after one of my favourite trees - the Jackpine," Acorn explained. "If it looks like nothing on Earth - not even a Jackpine. It must be a Jackpine ... or a Canadian."

Acorn himself was in many ways a Jackpine of a poet. His sometimes spiky demeanour and refusal to abide by the status quo may have put him on the outside of the more traditional and academic poetic circles, but it was his sincerity and connection to the everyday people of Canada that made him connect to his audience and find himself as a poet. This is also what has allowed his poetry to stand the test of time. Acorn passed away in 1986 in his hometown of Charlottetown from complications with a heart condition and diabetes, but his poetry continues to live on in Canada and beyond and is celebrated to this day. In his biographical documentary *In Love and Anger: Milton Acorn—Poet*, Acorn stated, “I never want to die. I want to tell all, all, all. And there’s no end to it.” We are so lucky for all he was able to tell.

Related Resource Links: Watch the [1984 documentary *In Love and Anger: Milton Acorn – Poet*](#) on the National Film Board of Canada website. Directed by Kent Martin, it features firsthand footage of Acorn walking the streets of his hometown of Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island and speaking about his poetry, his political ideologies, and much more.

Glossary, Mentions, and Who's Who

A&L Club – The Arts & Letters Club of Toronto. An organization founded in 1908 by a group of academics and artists of various disciplines committed to advocating for the arts in English-speaking Canada.

Alan Turing – English mathematician and computer scientist.

Alden – Alden Nowlan (1933-1983). Canadian poet, novelist, and playwright.

Arturo Bandini – The name of the fictional short story written by the character of Arturo Bandini in John Fante's novel *Ask The Dust*, a story that fails to impress all but one of the other characters.

Auden – W.H. Auden (1907-1973). British-American poet, playwright, and essayist referred to by some critics as an anti-Romantic poet.

Belleville – A city in Ontario, between Ottawa and Toronto.

Black Label – Johnnie Walker Black Label, whiskey aged 12+ years.

Bliss Carman – Canadian poet (1861-1929) who gained international fame living in the United States, becoming Canada's poet laureate in his later years. Purdy has expressed reading a lot of Carman for a period of time.

Boorish – The quality of being rude or coarse.

Cannonball – CBC Television adventure drama series starring Paul Birch and William Campbell, following their adventures as long-haul truck drivers across the United States and Canada.

Caterwauling – To strongly protest or complain.

Chapbook – A small book of collected poems, stories, etc.

Contact Press – A poets' cooperative (1952-1967) founded by Louis Dudek, Raymond Souster, and Irving Layton to improve publishing opportunities for Canadian poets.

Curt Lang – Curtis Earle Lang (1937-1998). Canadian poet, painter, photographer, and man of many other vocations. Born and spent most of his life in Vancouver, belonging to a group of writers referred to as the "downtown poets".

Dudek – Louis Dudek (1918-2001). Canadian poet, academic, and publisher known for his formative contributions to Modernism in poetry.

Dylan Thomas – Welsh poet and writer (1914-1953) whose work centers on themes of life, death, nostalgia, and loss of innocence.

Earle Birney – Highly institutionally educated Canadian novelist and experimental poet (1904-1995). Won the Governor General’s Award twice for his poetry.

Force majeure – A force or event that cannot be anticipated nor controlled.

Ford – Robert Ford (1915-1998). Canadian poet, translator, and diplomat.

George Bowering – (1935-). Canadian novelist, poet, historian, and biographer. Wrote a biography about Al Purdy.

GG – Governor General’s Award, an annual award started in 1936 that recognizes the greatest work in Canadian Literature.

Gwen McEwan – Gwendolyn MacEwan (1941-1987). Canadian poet and novelist from Toronto. Married to Milton Acorn 1962-64.

Header – In relation to the A-Frame; a single member made up of two or more wood members attached together, used to create openings for doors, windows, and interior passageways.

“Howl” – A poem written by Alan Ginsberg, controversial for, among other reasons, inclusion of homosexual themes.

Impetuous – To act without thinking; to be impulsive.

In Love and Anger – Milton Acorn’s self-published chapbook of poems.

Irish War of Independence – (1919-1921) A war that saw Irish nationalists pursuing independence for Ireland from the United Kingdom against British security forces and Irish loyalists.

Irving Layton – Romanian-born Canadian poet (1912-2006). Known for his candor, earning him many fans as well as enemies.

Isherwood – Christopher Isherwood (1904-1986). Anglo-American novelist, playwright, screenwriter, autobiographer, and diarist.

Lignum Vitae Tree – a tree that produces hard, heavy wood.

Lowry – Clarence Malcolm Lowry (1909-1957). English poet and novelist.

Macallan 12 – a 12-year-old single malt scotch whiskey.

Magnanimous – Feeling or behaving in a generous, kind manner.

Moment Magazine – Small magazine publishing seven issues from February 1960 to June 1962 out of Montréal. Co-edited by Milton Acorn, first with Al Purdy and later with Gwen MacEwan.

Ondaatje – Michael Ondaatje (1943-). Sri-Lankan-Canadian poet, fiction writer, and novelist.

Obdurate – to be highly stubborn.

Prosody – The rhythm and intonation of language.

RCAF – Royal Canadian Air Force.

Reany – James Reaney (1926-2008). Canadian poet, playwright, author, professor, and literary critic. A majority of his work is about where he grew up in Easthope (near Stratford, Ontario.)

Robert Finch – (1900-1995). Canadian poet and academic. Received the Governor General's Award for his first collection *Poems* in 1946, and again in 1961 for *Acis*.

Robert Frost – (1874-1963). One of the most famous American poets, known for his writings on New England rural life.

Roblin Lake Mill – A historic pioneer water-powered mill originally located in Ameliasburgh Township, Prince Edward County.

Sally Ann – the Salvation Army.

South Pacific – A hit musical by Rodgers and Hammerstein premiering in 1949 on Broadway, one of its songs being "Cockeyed Optimist."

Stephen Spender – (1909-1995). English poet, novelist, and essayist whose work focused on class and social justice.

T.S. Eliot's *The Criterion* – A British literary magazine created and edited by T.S. Eliot that published work from October 1932 - January 1939.

The Quinte – Thought to be either the Quine Hotel in Belleville or Trenton, Ontario.

The Second Coming – A poem written by Yeats in 1919.

The Star – newspaper the Toronto Star.

TISH boys – TISH was a Canadian poetry newsletter run by student poets at the University of British Columbia from 1961-1969.

Troglodyte – A person regarded as very reclusive or barbaric in their attitude or behaviour.

Verisimilitude – the quality or state of having the appearance of truth or realism.

Vociferation – shouting or crying out.

Wilfred Watson – Canadian poet and dramatist (1911-1998).

Yeats – William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) - Irish poet, dramatist, writer, and politician. Widely regarded as one of the greatest poets of the 20th century. Referred to by the nickname "Billy Butler" in this play.

Discussion Prompts

Pre-Show

- When you think of a poet, what kind of person do you imagine? What do they look like? How do they dress? How do they speak? What sorts of things do they think and speak about?
- How are platonic relationships between men typically portrayed in theatre and other media? How accurate are these representations in comparison to the friendships you see between men in real life?
- What does the setting of the isolated A-frame in its quiet natural environment suggest to you about the nature of this play?
- Why do you think it's important to be talking about poets like Al Purdy and Milton Acorn in 2024?
- Depending on how much you know about Al Purdy and Milton Acorn, how do you think that abundance or lack of knowledge will influence how you approach this play and its characters?

Post-Show:

- How did your image of a poet match up with the play's portrayals of Al and Milt?
- How do you interpret Al and Milt's relationship? To what extent do you think they are being their true, vulnerable selves with one another, and how much do you think they're performing a persona of toughness?
- How does the play portray masculinity? Do you think Al and Milt's representations of masculinity are healthy or toxic?
- How did the changes in the physical structure of the A-frame and the surrounding natural environment mirror or contradict the changes in the story and the relationship between Al and Milt?
- How do the conversations between Al and Milt resonate in 2024? How do these subjects of artistic merit and success, fear of failure, access to the arts, and their other topics of conversation apply today?
- What is it about Al and Milt that makes them worth theatrically resurrecting in this way? How do they stand out in comparison to other poets you know, Canadian or otherwise?
- How do you interpret the meaning of Milt's dream in the play's opening scene?
- How do you think the significance and role of poetry has changed since Al and Milt's time? Do you think it still holds the same value in 2024?
- What elements of the play feel uniquely Canadian, and which feel more universal?
- What do you believe the significance of the play's title is?
- How do you interpret the ending of the play? What impact does Milt's poem / *Shout Love* leave as the story draws to a close?

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Enrichment Guide Contributor Biography

Jasmine Hopfe (she/they) is a queer, mixed-race Egyptian/European multidisciplinary theatre artist and producer. Her theatrical practice includes performance, writing, directing, producing, and more. Recent theatre credits include: Ann in *All My Sons* (Walterdale Theatre), Cassandra in *Stir-Crazy* (Edmonton Fringe), Elliot in *Brick Shithouse* (Found Festival), Raymonde in *A Flea in Her Ear* (University of Alberta), and Assistant Director and Stage Manager of *Hacking and Slashing* (Edmonton Fringe). Having recently graduated from the University of Alberta with a Bachelor of Arts in Drama (Honours) in June 2023, Jasmine is thrilled to expand their theatrical experience

into the wonderful world of dramaturgy. This is their first dramaturgical endeavour, and they could not be more excited to share their learning with the audience of this beautiful play, nor more grateful to the Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre for this opportunity.

A theatrical production that really stands out to Jasmine is Makram Ayache's *The Hooves Belonged to the Deer*, mounted by In Arms Theatre Collective through Fringe Theatre Adventures in Edmonton in October 2023. The nuanced and deeply personal manner in which queerness, faith, and Arab identity are addressed through the play's stellar script, gripping performances, and stunning design is unlike anything she has ever seen, and she hopes to see the show find more life for many audiences in the future.

Thank you to Canada Life for generously supporting student tickets!

