

crew trained in the theatre program at Sir Wilfred Grenfell College). *Tempting Providence* made its debut at the Gros Morne Theatre Festival in 2002 to sell-out crowds and was reprised the next season. Since then, the play has toured to the National Arts Centre in Ottawa in July 2004, to the prestigious Traverse Theatre venue at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, and to multiple venues in

Ireland and England. This fall's itinerary (available at www.theatrenewfoundland.com) includes intensive tours in Saskatchewan, Ontario and Atlantic Canada.

During the play's UK tour, some critics more urbane than the present one found *Tempting Providence* a little tame — too episodic, too straightforward, insufficiently complex. If you want cyn-

cism, doubt or more than the gentlest irony, don't seek it here. Humour there is, but of a quiet kind, as in the following exchange (which ceildh-goers on either side of the Atlantic will appreciate):

- MYRA: You people, it's amazing. This perfectly nice house, with a perfectly nice parlour, couches, chairs, and you all insist upon squeezing into a kitchen the size of a closet.
- ANGUS: It's a proper dance my dear. Can't stray from the kitchen.

My twins

I was looking after twins, twins with bronchiolitis.

At morning signover, whoever had been on call would tell me how much trouble the twins, those terrible twins, had been overnight. During morning rounds, I'd joke that I had only bothered to do one physical exam for the both of them. I tried, succeeding on some days and failing on others, to find some time to take with their exhausted mother, who was being worn away by the demands of her babies who were sick and the other kids at home who weren't. I struggled to remember which boy was which, eventually keeping it straight by thinking of them as "the one by the window" and "the one by the door." Consequently, I lived in terror that the nurses might, for some inscrutable purpose, switch the boys' positions. That never happened, but they did get moved to another room, and I had to adapt quickly to calling them "the one on the left" and "the one on the right." When on call at night, I'd check on the twins, those worrisome twins, and listen to the frightful difficulty of their breathing. Once or twice their nurse found me there in the middle of the night, and joined me in my fretting.

There was something weird about those boys. On admission, each was struggling to breathe, too tired to eat, and suffering from an ugly diaper rash. They were in the same shape, more or less. Then one of the boys improved, his breathing becoming less harrowing. But his brother worsened. Then he started to get better as well, but only after we got a report of a positive blood culture from a sample taken before admission. We decided it was probably a contaminated culture and nothing to worry about, but then the other one's rash got worse. One change of antifungals later, the rash was improving, but the boy got a fever. We x-rayed him and found a pneumonia.

As I wrote the order to start antibiotics, I was wondering what was going on. There seemed to be, between the two boys, a fixed and limited amount of health that was being traded back and forth. Was there only one life between the two of them, only half a life each? Would one eventually snatch all of that life away from the other?

Before I had much chance to think about this, to get into a philosophical frenzy about it, the twins, my helpless twins, started to get better. They went home with their mother, and I went on looking after other patients.

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The script is certainly episodic: an energetic, chronological run through life events, trials and accomplishments, ending with a recitation of Nurse Bennett's various life honours and awards. That being said, the flow from scene to scene is tightly choreographed and fascinating to watch as the white-clad actors-cum-stagehands swiftly transform the scene. The white cloth is transmogrified from bedsheet to wedding dress and swaddled baby; the chairs and tables are sickbed, sawtable, cradle, sled. The economical and ingenious uses of these props is itself a metaphor for the inventiveness of necessity — the self-reliance of outpost life and of those nurses in remote communities who must also play the role of surgeon and doctor.

In such places, community itself is necessity's child. If there is a central, providential revelation in Myra's life as dramatized by this play, it is that the absence she grapples with is illusory. After the ordeal of the heroic surgical repair, knowing full well the dangers of infection and rejection and the virtually impossible distance to medical and surgical care, Myra's desperation reaches an anguished and almost incoherent pitch. And then she sees, materializing in the distance, figures approaching — folk from along the coast, alerted by radio and coming to help. At this moment the audience sees what Myra sees — no longer a bleak and empty landscape but a community that wills itself into being, transcending distances and sustaining anyone who finds the courage to belong.

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