

Promethean Theatre Ensemble presents

# **A Town Called Progress**

Written by Trina Kakacek

Directed by Anna C. Bahow

[Image of a worn wooden sign in a parched desert landscape]

A World Premiere March 16 – April 15, 2023

Performed at The Den Theatre

1331 N Milwaukee Ave

Chicago, IL 60622

## **Running time**

Approximately 2 hours, including one 10-minute intermission

Please silence all cell phones.

## Cast

Cameron Feagin ----- Ida

Kali Skatchke----- Vivian

Teri Talo ----- Slim

Chris Woolsey ----- Weed

## Understudies

Gunner Bradley ----- Weed (understudy)

Julia Cicero ----- Vivian (understudy)

Christina Renee Jones ----- Ida (understudy)

Megan Wesner ----- Slim (understudy)

## Music recorded by Twilight Stealers

Mitzi Lebensorge ----- Mandolin/ Vocals

Ellen Shepard----- Banjo

Mary Tabatowsk ----- Fiddle/Guitar/Vocals

## Staff and Creatives

Kyle Aschbrenner----- Assistant Director/Stage Manager

Anna C. Bahow ----- Director

Charlie Baker ----- Intimacy/Violence Designer

Jeremiah Barr ----- Scenic Designer/Technical Director/  
Props Designer

Samantha K. Barr ----- Production Manager

Andres Coronado ----- Dramaturg/Appreciation Guide

Jared Dennis ----- Producer

Cameron Feagin ----- Casting

Emily Hayman ----- Sound Designer

Trina Kakacek ----- Playwright

Brian Pastor ----- Artistic Co-Producer

Karen Wallace ----- Lighting Designer

## Director's Note

I have been inspired by the brilliant, thoughtful, kind, smart, ambitious, resourceful women in my family: teachers and doctors, caregivers, mothers, sisters, grandmothers, adventurers, readers, gardeners, cooks, storytellers and listeners. Each in their own way trying to make a better world for themselves, the ones they love, and the larger community around them.

In Trina Kakacek play *A Town Called Progress* the characters work to find a space, a utopia that allows them to be themselves. They push and pull as the idea of community is negotiated and reevaluated. The play has had a long gestation and become more relevant to our current world with each draft. The play addresses not only women's rights but gender inclusivity, ageism and the environment.

Promethean Theatre Ensemble as it is evolving has been negotiating a new more inclusive way of creating and building stories that extends out to including community partners.

## **Director's Note (continued)**

Storytelling is how we as theatre artists in a small way try and make a better world. We work to make space for all of us together in a room with our audience to connect ideas, have a laugh, and be in community as we strive for progress.

Anna C. Bahow

Director

## **A Note from the Playwright**

I'll never forget the day girls were finally allowed to wear pants to school. 4th grade - late 60's. I remember Miss M. saying, "Now girls, don't think just because you are wearing pants that school is a picnic." Did the boys receive the same lecture? Doubtful.

Growing up during the feminist movement set a plate full of tasks in front of us and of course we wanted to take a bite of it all because it was there and we were told we should. And we did. Even the media portrayed women as bringing home bacon,

## **A Note from the Playwright (continued)**

frying it up in a pan, or splitting themselves into multiple individuals to accomplish this mythic ideal of having it all. We chase it, ALL, and we learn what works, what doesn't. We win things, we lose things. At times it can feel like we have shot ourselves in the foot. We stop, and regroup.

I started out writing about the water supply, and how water may become currency as arable land is bought up by wealthy individuals. I was inspired by research on early matriarchal societies. So smart, so efficient. Small communities with built in economic support for systems of caregiving, family, and the sharing of skills. I can still see these elements at work in small ways in our own communities - but clearly, we can do better.

One step forward, and of late, a few steps back –

As if some are afraid such systems could actually work?

Stop, regroup, keep going forward.

Trina Kakacek

Playwright

## Cast Bios

**Cameron Feagin** (Ida) was last seen as Richard III in Promethean's Richard III. Cameron is a proud member of Promethean and has performed in Arcadia, The Winter's Tale, Gross Indecency, Blue Stockings, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead. Other credits include King Lear, Elling (Redtwist Theatre), Pride and Prejudice, Wuthering Heights, Pistols For Two, (Lifeline Theatre), The Elephant Man (Boho Theatre), Thirteen Days, London Assurance, Macbeth, Private Lives (Non-Equity Jeff nomination: Actress in a Principal Role), Old Times, Seascape, The Play's the Thing, The Turn of the Screw, (City Lit), Court-Martial at Fort Devens (Victory Gardens), and Voyeurs de Venus (Chicago Dramatists).  
(She/Her)

**Kali Skatchke** (Vivian) is a natural-born Chicagoan, and Northwestern University graduate. Previous theatre credits include Dead Man Walking (Lyric Opera of Chicago), Equivocation (Idle Muse Theatre Company), Ladies in Waiting

## **Cast Bios (continued)**

(Theatre Above the Law), and ENGAGE! at Theatre Wit. Film and TV credits include horror feature The Lurker opposite Naomi Grossman and Scout Taylor-Compton, upcoming feature Year One opposite Elizabeth Yu, and the web series Hot Summer Daze which earned her a nomination for Best Actress in a Drama at the Rio Webfest. Kali is represented by The Rock Talent Agency. See more at [www.kaliskatchke.com](http://www.kaliskatchke.com). (She/Her)

**Teri Talo** (Slim) is excited to be performing with Promethean Theatre Ensemble for the first time. Teri has been in multiple play festivals including Stage Left's Spring Fling and Lightbulb Factory's Short Circuit. Teri has also performed with Forest Park Theatre Company's production of Innogen as Causis Lucias. Teri is a recent graduate of UIC BFA Acting program and is continuing to grow and learn as an actor and theater artist. They are so grateful that you are here on this journey with them. (They/Them)



## Cast Bios (continued)

**Chris Woolsey** (Weed) is thrilled to be working again with Promethean Theatre Ensemble after performing as Septimus in *Arcadia*, and Frank in *Mrs. Warren's Profession*. Past credits include the short film *Curtains* and performing for The Second City Theatricals. You can catch him online on his YouTube channel which he cleverly named *Chris Woolsey*. He would like to thank his family, friends, and his partner Abigail for all their support. (He/Him)

## Understudy Bios

**Gunner Bradley** (Weed - understudy) is a theater artist transplant from Texas who's still adjusting to the midwestern winters and endless traffic. Receiving a BFA in acting from Texas State University (2018), he's since been working around Chicago wherever a big ol' southern boy is needed, including Oak Park Theater Festival, The Conspirators, Jedlicka Theater, and many more! Additionally, he has a BS in web development and loves nerding out over technology and theater. A recent

## **Understudy Bios (continued)**

addition to the Promethean Theatre Ensemble, Gunner is thrilled to be a part of such a talented group. (He/Him)

**Julia Cicero** (Vivian - understudy) is thrilled to be joining Promethean Theatre Ensemble for the first time! She is an actor, musician, and writer who was born and raised right here in the Windy City. Julia has a BFA in Musical Theater from Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, and her recent credits include Valhalla (The Plagiarists), Bright Star (Mountain Movers Theatre Co.) and Alice in Wonderland (Prairie Fire Children's Theatre). Julia would like to thank her family, Jeremy, and her cat, Mac, for their love and support. (She/Her)

**Christina Renee Jones** (Ida - understudy) is ecstatic to be a part of Promethean Theatre Ensemble after performing in several versions of An Evening of Shakespeare. Recent acting credits include Upon This Shore: A Tale of Pericles and the Daughters of Tyre (Idle Muse Theatre), Ode at Pint's End (Birch House

## **Understudy Bios (continued)**

Immersive), In the Next Room (or The Vibrator Play) (Idle Muse Theatre). Other acting credits include City Lit, Midsommer Flight, A Dead Whale Productions, the side project, Akvavit, and others. Her writing has been seen in numerous forms around town through The New Coordinates, Birch House Immersive, Eccentric Expedition, Junior Varsity, Potluck, and Factory Theater. Learn more at [www.christinareneejones.com](http://www.christinareneejones.com).

(She/Her)

**Megan Wesner** (Slim - understudy) is pleased to be making their Chicago debut with Promethean Theatre Ensemble. They have previously worked as an actor, director, and scenic painter for various Michigan theaters including Purple Rose Theatre Company, All-of-Us Express, Young Players Theatre, and Hope Summer Repertory Theatre. Theatre credits include: Whatcha Doin? (Theatre Nova), A Christmas Carol and The Wizard of Oz (Wild Swan Theatre). Commercial/film credits include Therapy Today & CATA Transportation with InVerve Marketing, short

## **Understudy Bios (continued)**

films Townies and (Un)Employed. Megan would like to thank Devin and their newfound Chicago community for all the support. (They/Them)

## **Staff and Creatives Bios**

**Kyle Aschbrenner** (Assistant Director/Stage Manager) is a director, dramaturg and stage manager from Central IL. He moved to Chicago in 2019 after graduating from Southern Illinois University Carbondale. Since then, he's stage managed and directed shows with the Miracle Center, University of Illinois at Chicago and Stage Left Theatre. Kyle has a passion for new works and is very excited to be a part of this exciting new play's journey! Other directing credits include Mr. Marmalade (director, SIUC), Punk Rock (director, SIUC), Cruise (director, Stage Left), Open (assistant director/dramaturg, Stage Left), Man of the People (assistant director/stage manager, Stage Left) He is currently an ensemble member of Stage Left Theatre. (He/Him)

## **Staff and Creatives Bios (continued)**

**Anna C. Bahow** (Director) is a Chicago-based theatre director, producer and new play dramaturg. Committed to the development of new work and a diversity of voices, she is a Promethean Theatre Ensemble member, an Artistic Associate with Silk Road Rising which foregrounds Asian, South Asian, and Middle Eastern artists, an Associate Artist with The International Voices Project, and an Associate Artist at Chicago Dramatists. Bahow has received an After Dark Award for her directing, and her productions have received Chicago JEFF Awards for New Work and Use of Multi-Media. She was honored to be Michael Maggio Fellow at the Goodman Theatre, a recipient of a 3ARTS WAVE Grant and Illinois and City of Chicago Individual Artist Grants. More at [AnnaBahow.com](http://AnnaBahow.com) (She/Her)

**Charlie Baker** (Intimacy/Violence Designer) is grateful to be a part of this production and would like to donate their bio to raise awareness of the anti-trans and anti-LGBTQ legislation

## **Staff and Creatives Bios (continued)**

being proposed across the US. In 2023 over 350 anti-LGBTQ bills have been proposed across state houses and senates. Donate time to research proposed laws in your home states, call local and state representatives, donate resources in clothing, supplies, or volunteer work to LGBTQ community and legal services, and donate money to resources like the Trevor Project, and pro-LGBTQ legal agencies. (He/They)

**Jeremiah Barr** (Scenic Designer/Technical Director/Props Designer) Technically inclined, Jeremiah is a jack of all trades: technical director, scenic designer, props, puppets, masks, carpentry, rigging, stage and production management. He works with some of the coolest people around including Promethean Theatre Ensemble, City Lit Theater, Northlight Theater, Black Button Eyes, Midsommer Flight and Astonrep, of which he is a founding member. Jeremiah is also a technical director for Dominican University's theater department.

## **Staff and Creatives Bios (continued)**

He wishes to send warm wishes to everyone with PTE and to his lovely and most talented wife, Samantha. (He/Him)

**Samantha K. Barr** (Production Manager) Is pleased to be working with such a fine group of artists on A Town Called Progress. Past credits include light design for Buried Child and When We Were Young and Unafraid (AstonRep Theater Co), production management for Playboy of the Western World (City Lit Theatre), and production management for the 2021/2022 Dominican University Theater Arts Lab series.

Samantha would like to thank the fantastic cast and crew of this show, and as always Doc, Scout and Jeremiah for the endless love, support, and fur balls. (She/Her)

**Andres Coronado** (Dramaturg/Appreciation Guide) is a performer, writer, director, dramaturg, and museum worker. They are a recent ensemble member at Promethean Theatre Ensemble and The Neo-Futurists, and a member and co-

## **Staff and Creatives Bios (continued)**

founder of the Sarah Street Collective. They have worked with Chicago theatre companies Odd's Bodkins Ensemble, The Conspirators, Runaways Lab Theatre, Connective Theatre Company, Valiant Theatre Company, and Chicago Dramatists. Back in Texas, they co-founded Break A Leg Laredo, producing children's theatre and teaching kids the evils of theatre and acting. Texas State University, BFA. (He/They)

**Jared Dennis** (Producer) holds an M.F.A. from the Theatre School at DePaul and a certificate from The Royal National Theatre Studio, London. Past performances include Shakesploitation! and The David Bowie Christmas Special 1978 (New Millennium) Henry V, A Study In Scarlet (Promethean Ensemble) Antigone, Twelfth Night, A Comedy of Errors, and Hamlet (First Folio) Much Ado About Nothing, Richard II, and Henry IV Parts 1 and 2 (Chicago Shakespeare Theatre), and The Voysey Inheritance (Remy Bumppo). Jared is proud to be a member of the Promethean Theatre Ensemble. (He/Him)



## **Staff and Creatives Bios (continued)**

**Emily Hayman** (Sound Designer) is a Chicago-based sound designer and composer. Recent sound design credits include Extra Yarn (Lifeline Theatre), Dooby Dooby Moo (Lifeline Theatre), Men on Boats (Illinois Wesleyan University), The New Play Festival (Northwestern University); Squirrel Girl Goes to College and Come Back, Little Sheba (DePaul University). Assistant sound design for Describe the Night (Steppenwolf), New Stages (Goodman Theatre), The Notebook (Chicago Shakespeare Theatre), Seagull (Steppenwolf), and Choir Boy (Steppenwolf). Emily received her BFA in Sound Design from The Theatre School at DePaul University. (She/Her)

**Trina Kakacek** (Playwright) is co-founder, co-producer, writer, and sound designer for Small Fish Radio Theatre. Her award-winning plays have been featured at Chicago Dramatists, Stage Left, Lincoln Square, Victory Gardens, Infusion Theatre, Women's Theatre Alliance, Dream Theatre, Chicago Fringe, and the Atlanta Fringe Festival. She teaches playwriting to Chicago

## **Staff and Creatives Bios (continued)**

public high school students with the Pegasus Theatre Young Playwrights Festival. Trina would like to extend special thanks to her family and friends, Courier 12 Collective, New Plays Coop, MJ Kelly, Brett Lee, Rob Koon, Jamie Bragg and everyone at Promethean who has supported this project from the very beginning. (She/Her)

**Brian Pastor** (Artistic Co-Producer) is a producer, actor, director, and playwright in Chicago. They are a founder and former artistic director of Promethean Theatre Ensemble, and they currently serve as resident director at City Lit Theater. Since graduating from Northwestern University, Brian has produced over 100 shows professionally, primarily with Promethean, City Lit, Raven Theatre, Sideshow Theatre, Chicago dell'Arte, and The Mime Company. Love to Joshanna and the kitties. (They/Them)

## **Staff and Creatives Bios (continued)**

**Rachel M. Sypniewski** (Costume Designer) is thrilled to be back with Promethean! Other companies she has worked with include Goodman, Music Theater Works, Trap Door, Oak Park Festival Theater, Broken Nose, Black Button Eyes, Jackalope, The New Colony, Emerald City, Lifeline, Porchlight, Griffin , CityLit, Chopin, Compass, Strawdog, Vitalist, Rasaka, The Factory, Red Tape and Redtwist. She also has designed at Wheaton College, Governor's State University, North Central College, St. Patrick's High School, Indiana University Northwest, and the Chicago Academy for the Arts. She is an eight-time non-equity Jeff nominee, having been awarded one for La Bête at Trap Door. More info at [rachelsyp.com](http://rachelsyp.com) (She/Her)

**Karen Wallace** (Lighting Designer) is a queer, mixed lighting artist based in Chicago. They are excited for their debut production with Promethean Theatre Company. Karen's recent credits include Lighting Designer for Fillet of Solo (Lifeline Theatre), and Lighting Supervisor for Dooby Dooby Moo,

## **Staff and Creatives Bios (continued)**

Fillet of Solo, and Extra Yarn (Lifeline Theatre). She also works as a drafter for Schuler Shook Theatre Planners. Karen is passionate about representative and equitable production and seeks to tell stories that people can identify with. You can find more of her work at [KarenWallaceLD.com](http://KarenWallaceLD.com). (She/They)

## **Special Thanks**

Karin Abercrombie, Brett Lee, Betty's Place, Diane Fairchild, Dominican University, Midsommer Flight, Promethean Board of Directors, and Swedish American Museum

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Production photography by Airan Wright at [airanwright.com](http://airanwright.com)

# Promethean Theatre Ensemble

## In the Community

PTE is proud to partner with Chicago Foundation for Women during our production of A Town Called Progress.

Since 1985, **Chicago Foundation for Women** has invested more than \$45 million through over 4,000 grants, annually impacting 226,000 women, girls, trans, and gender nonbinary individuals across the Chicago region, so they can lead lives that are healthy, safe, and economically secure. Nearly four decades later, CFW continues to be the only organization in the Chicago region to take a comprehensive approach to expanding economic security, ensuring freedom from violence, and enhancing access to health services for these individuals. Learn more and donate at [cfw.org](http://cfw.org).

Promethean Theatre Ensemble's previous community partners include Chicago Votes, Southside Blooms, Greater Chicago Food Depository, Black Lives Matter Chicago, Brave Space Alliance, Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation, Women &

## **Promethean Theatre Ensemble**

### **In the Community (continued)**

Children First Bookstore's Women's Voices Fund, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, and Howard Brown Health. When you're looking around for charitable giving opportunities, we hope you'll consider supporting these worthwhile organizations.

# About Promethean Theatre Ensemble

## **Our Mission Statement** - Promethean Theatre Ensemble

produces and develops ensemble-focused theatre that uses vibrant language with dynamic and purposeful storytelling. We select a service organization to support and promote with each production, bridging ideas within the play to real-world efforts to address challenges within our communities.

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We at Promethean Theatre Ensemble believe that to be silent is to be complicit. To the people of color we work with, work for, and love – and to those we may never even meet – we express our heartfelt support. #BlackLivesMatter. We join with arts organizations worldwide to call for an end to racialized violence and the cycle of loss and grief they perpetuate in our families and our communities #StopAsianHate. We are working at being better. Here are some resources we are spending time with: Black Lives Matter Chicago, Brave Space Alliance, WSYWAT, Anti-Asian Violence Resources, and Hollaback. Visit our website to read about our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiatives.

# Promethean Theatre Ensemble Members

Anna C. Bahow

Jeremian Barr

Alexa Berkowitz

Gunner Bradley

Jamie Bragg

Simmery Branch

Tristan Brandon

Michael Brigance

Elaine Carlson

Andres Coronado

Jared Dennis

Cameron Feagin

Jessica Goforth

Nicole Hand

Brian Hurst

Brendan Hutt

Christina Renee Jones

Anne Lentino



## **Promethean Theatre Ensemble Members**

**(continued)**

Jack Morsovillo

Brian Pastor

Joshua Servantez

Kevin Sheehan

Meghann Tabor

Destin Lorde Teamer

John Walski (forever in our hearts)

## **Promethean Artistic Associates**

Kaci Antkiewic

Janeane Bowlware

Carrie Campana

Catherine Gillespie

Nick Lake

John Arthur Lewis

Tom McGrath

# Promethean Artistic Associates (continued)

Tom Murphy

Brian Perry

Ed Rutherford

Heather Kae Smith

Rae Watson

Alice Wu

# Promethean Board of Directors

Tony Fiorentino ----- Interim President & Treasurer

Twilia Meeks -----Secretary

Jared Dennis ----- Director

Tia Lantzy ----- Director

James D. Mackey ----- Director

Melanie Spewock ----- Director

Interested in joining the PTE Board of Directors? Learn about opportunities by contacting our board outreach team at executive@prometheantheatre.org. We'd love to talk to you.

# **With Sincere Thanks to Our Sponsors and Donors**

Promethean is incredibly grateful for our sponsors, grantors and donors who allow us to continue our mission of storytelling in this great city. We would like to particularly thank these sponsors:

- Promethean Theatre Ensemble is partially supported by a grant from the **Illinois Arts Council Agency** through federal funds provided by the **National Endowment for the Arts**.
- And **The MacArthur Funds for Culture, Equity, and the Arts** at the **Richard H. Driehaus Foundation**.

## **Donors**

The following list is inclusive of donors who made contributions between January 1, 2021 and December 31, 2022.

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## **Donors (continued)**

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...and to all of our donors who have chosen to give  
anonymously.

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All donations are tax deductible.

Want to see your name here?

Visit [www.prometheantheatre.org](http://www.prometheantheatre.org)

## **PTE Production History**

**Season 16** (2021-22) Richard III, Online reading of Sketchtopia 2022 (Inclusive Playwright Project, co-produced with Shattered Globe Theatre)

**Season 15** (2020-21) Online reading of Take the Rubbish Out, Sasha (with The International Voices Project); Online reading of Sketchtopia 2021 (Artist Development Workshop, co-produced with Shattered Globe Theatre); Online reading of Lucid

**Season 14** (2019-20) Online reading of Spring Breakdown: A Virtual Evening of Shakespeare; Mrs. Warren's Profession; Blue Stockings

**Season 13** (2018-19) An Evening of Shakespeare: Good Scenes from "Bad" Plays; Mad Beat Hip & Gone; Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde; Arcadia

**Season 12** (2017-18) BLISS (or Emily Post is Dead!); An Evening of Shakespeare: A Night of Tudor Propaganda; The Madwoman of Chaillot; Marisol

## **PTE Production History (continued)**

**Season 11** (2016-17) An Evening of Shakespeare: Scenes from the Roman Plays; The Liar; Eurydice; Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde

**Season 10** (2015-16) The Lion in Winter; An Evening of Myths and Fables a.k.a. Myths Untold; Brontë

**Season 9** (2014-15) Tiger at the Gates; An Evening of Shakespeare: Lonely Hearts & Twisted Love; The Winter's Tale

**Season 8** (2013-14) Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead; An Evening of Shakespeare: Something Wicked This Way Comes; The Lark

**Season 7** (2012-13) A Study in Scarlet; Caucasian Chalk Circle; An Evening of Shakespeare: Black Magic

**Season 6** (2011-12) Henry V; An Evening of Shakespeare: On Love & Seeming; Seascape with Sharks and Dancer



## **PTE Production History (continued)**

**Season 5** (2010-11) Bury the Dead; Kennedy's Children; An Evening of Shakespeare: You-Call-It Shakespeare

**Season 4** (2009-10) Spring Awakening; The Fantasticks; The Last Unicorn; Department of Cultural Affairs: A Month of Development

**Season 3** (2008-09) Measure for Measure; An Evening of Shakespeare: Mad World, Mad Kings; The Illusion

**Season 2** (2007-08) Six Characters in Search of an Author; An Evening of Shakespeare: Dark Side of the Bard; The Light of Love

**Season 1** (2006-07) Our Country's Good; An Evening of Shakespeare: Shakespeare in the Garden; Beyond Therapy

## **Appreciation Guide**

# **A Town Called Progress**

Written by Trina Kakacek

Directed by Anna C. Bahow

## **Promethean Theatre Ensemble**

Learn stuff. Because it's not enough to be entertained.

## **Feminism, sexuality, and gender performance**

Feminism as a movement and social theory has gone through many iterations throughout the decades. During the early 2010s, feminism entered the zeitgeist as more people spoke to the nuances of racial oppression and gender bias. This contemporary “Fourth Wave” of Feminism attempts to prioritize inclusivity.

Feminism is incredibly nuanced and requires proper perspective in order to achieve proper equity for all. The nuance that *A Town Called Progress* speaks to is that of gender performance. Judith Butler controversially detached the topic of feminism and gender from psychology and biology, and instead placed it within aesthetics and performance. Butler claims that gender is not fixed by biological sex nor psychological differences, but through binary social obligations. In this play, gender as performance is acknowledged, poked fun at, played with, and argued.

## The Man Problem

Today, though a huge faction of people acknowledges the issues with the “gender-binary” and even identity outside of it, the power dynamics of gender continue to thrive. Similar to capitalism, gender-binary dynamics place certain people at the top, and others at the bottom.

In *A Town Called Progress*, Ida, our hero, is attempting to break out of many power dynamics that have failed her. She is incredibly distrustful of men, so much so that she can detect when one is near. This might play into the trope of the man hating feminist or lesbian. However, this mistrust can be both an opposing and a credible feminist argument.

Pauline Harmange defines misandry as “a principle of precaution” and states that her personal hatred and distrust of men is grounded in the violence and abuse of misogyny. The treatment of women has ended in trauma and death, and to endure the violent hand of the patriarchy is to be complacent in

## **The Man Problem (continued)**

this treatment. Day-to-day dynamics of misandry, according to Harmange, could influence men's personal misogynistic thinking at best, and lead them to be annoying male-feminist martyrs at worst.

[Image of "Male tears" embroidery, with a (male) tear falling down into a cup of tea, Anne Jea. Public domain, Wikimedia Commons.]

## **Stuff to think & talk about**

**during intermission, with your friends after the show, or while tossing and turning in bed tonight**

[Three images: a woman pensively looking out a window; a man and woman discussing something over coffee; an older man reading something while deep in thought]

If you were to create a new society, what rules and practices would you enforce?

How do you share responsibilities and rewards in your school/workplace? Do you think those regulations are fair? Do the same regulations apply to your home-life?

Do you think the way labor and leadership currently stand in our country is fair? How so? How can it be improved?

What does ownership mean? In a workplace, who owns the labor and who owns the product?

## **Stuff to think & talk about (continued)**

What makes a good leader?

How do you contribute to your community?

In what ways do you think urban life, suburban life, and rural life are different? How are they similar?

Have you or your family faced water or food insecurity?

How did/do you manage? If not, how do you think others who face this issue manage?

What does fairness mean?

Do you treat others differently based on their gender?

Do others treat you differently based on your gender?

How does gender negatively and positively impact your life?

## **Trans-Masculinity as Survival**

Slim's character has gone through a few iterations as this play was developed and workshopped. In earlier drafts, Slim was a woman cross dressing as man due to trauma and as a survival tactic. Currently, Slim's gender is in a fluid place in the play. On paper, he fits within expectations of men, and everyone treats him as such, yet there are indications in the text that Slim's masculinity is more extended than we are led to believe.

In casting, Slim can be played by either a woman or a non-cis person (gender- queer, non-binary, etc.). Through these contexts, Slim's maleness can be seen as trans-masculine-by-survival.

This is akin to other masculine drag performances in theatre. In Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, Viola acts as the male servant Cesario in order to gain employment and move through a world where unmarried women without status cannot survive.



## **Trans-Masculinity as Survival (continued)**

Trans-masculinity as a form of survival is also found in various cultures. In Ukrainian Kanuni culture, revenge murders of men en masse are common, leaving families without a male heir. To adapt to this new reality, certain young girls, burrneshas, take a vow of chastity in exchange for a male identity in order to work, purchase land, and gain inheritance. Other similar gender practices include Bacha Posh in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and the immigrating Samsui women in Southeast Asia.

[Image of Orsino and Viola (dressed as a man) in Shakespeare's Twelfth Night. Frederick Richard Pickersgill. Circa 1850. Public domain.]

[Image of Sworn Virgins in Mirdita. Carleton Coon, 1929. Public domain.]

## Rural Water

In the play, water is an extended metaphor of a society's basic resources, and equal access to them. Ida and Vivian attempt to create their own independent water well with little success.

Through Slim's efforts Progress gets water, but only by connecting their pipeline to the other surrounding towns, to Ida's dismay. Yet, without this compromise, Progress would have no water. This lack of proper access is reflective of American ruralism. Most rural communities in the United States have issues with aging infrastructure affecting water quality.

These issues are exacerbated by external environmental violations, such as the recent train derailment incident in Ohio, and lack of proper relief and retaliations for those violations.

To update water infrastructure across the country would require \$190 billion, but as of 2019 only \$2.8 billion was federally allocated. Due to the privatization of water distribution, payment for these updates is left to local communities. However, rural communities are often poorer and less populated than their urban counterparts.

## **Rural Water (continued)**

A compromise, similar to that of Progress', would be necessary: change the need from private to regional, thus consolidating the cost of utilities across multiple communities.

[Black and white image of three men standing around a well in a desolate setting. Rangeland Water Development, eastern Oregon, Bureau of Land Management, 1954. Public domain.]

## **Utopia**

In *A Town Called Progress*, Ida is attempting something extraordinary. Tired of the ways of Conspiratorial and Backwards, Ida makes her own society, a utopia. "Utopia" was coined by Thomas More as the name of a fictional island in his novel exploring ideas of a free society. Early socialist thinkers were derogatorily called "Utopians" to belittle their efforts in steering away from monarchy and capitalism. Thinkers like Marxist Ernst Bloch and queer theorist Jose Esteban Muñoz

## **Utopia (continued)**

define “utopia” as a human principle to achieve social, economic, gender, and queer equity, a principle of hope. Utopian thinking explores ideas, not of the dark present, but the potential of the future. The town of Progress isn’t complete by the time we enter it. Ida is building it, and the narrative tension comes from the imperfection of society that works against “progress.” Thus, the work of a utopian is never done. Reaching utopia is never the goal; rather, curating and building paths is the essence of utopian progress, and the essence of Ida’s motivations in the play.

## **Utopia as Matriarchy**

The town of Progress, as it stands throughout the play, is a matriarchy. At first, it's a female- only township and develops into a more gender-diverse community, but the power of the women doesn't waver. Though patriarchy is a globally encompassing phenomenon, matriarchy has existed and been studied throughout history and literature. Famously, the

## **Utopia as Matriarchy (continued)**

Greeks' mythical Amazons were an all-women warrior society. Their societal practices included men only as a means for more children, and any males born to their mothers were given back to their fathers. Real life matriarchies have been extensively studied. Native contemporary matriarchies don't necessarily place women in power, rather they practice gender egalitarianism, not acknowledging euro-centric dynamics of gender, and instilling practices for the best of the community. These matriarchal groups include the Mosuo in Southwest China, the Minangkabau in West Sumatra, the Khasi and Garo in Meghalaya, India, the Kabyles in North Africa, and the Iroquoian peoples in North America, to name a few.

[Black and white image of Woman of Kabyle. "From an old painting." Women of Algeria in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Public domain.]

## Utopia as Rural Anarchy

The township of Progress utilizes quasi-government titles to assign responsibilities, but the community dynamic is closest to communal anarchy. Anarchism has been mis-defined for some time. It is seen as a concept of chaos and violence; however, it is actually one of freedom from the state. The town of Progress is closest to Mikhail Bukinin's early ideas of Anarchism as he knew it: communes of French peasants practicing an understanding of collective needs free from large government and their policies. Ida's "don't need more than you need" approach to supplying resources, and her leadership style, both align best with this classic idea of Anarchism.

Karl Marx and Freidrich Engels, friends and contemporaries of Bukinin, waxed poetic on communist leadership and government in order to leverage power towards the proletariat. Bukunin disagreed and found that smaller agricultural-based communities were the best way to achieve freedom from the evils of capitalist labor

## Utopia as Rural Anarchy (continued)

[Black and white image of semi-circular panel from a mural showing two women and one man nude or in classical garb with tools of destruction amid ruins labeled "anarchy." By Elihu Vedder, 1836-1923. Public domain.]

## References for further reading

### Further Reading

- *Do We Have To Work?: A Primer for The 21st Century*  
by Matthew Taylor
- *Can't Pay Won't Pay* by The Debt Collective
- *The Principal of Hope* by Ernst Bloch
- *Cruising Utopia* by Jose Esteban Muñoz
- *Socialism: A Very Short Introduction* by Michael Newman
- *Capitalist Realism* by Mark Fisher
- *I Hate Men* by Pauline Harmange

## References for further reading (continued)

### Further Reading (continued)

- *The Will to Change* by bell hooks
- *The Queer Art of Failure* by Jack Halberstam
- *Gender Trouble* by Judith Butler
- *Something That May Shock and Discredit You*  
by Daniel Lavery
- *Paul Takes the Form of a Mortal Girl* by Andrea Lawlor
- *What Comes After Farce* by Hal Foster
- *Simulacra and Simulations* by Jean Baudrillard



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Roberts, R. H. (1987). AN INTRODUCTORY READING OF ERNST BLOCH'S "THE PRINCIPLE OF HOPE" [Review of THE PRINCIPLE OF HOPE, by E. BLOCH]. *Literature and Theology*, 1(1), 89–112. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23925188>

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