

David Harris Flaherty Undergraduate Student Library Scholarship 2021 Recipient

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Award-winning Essay

One of my most valuable classes this year was Canadian Theatre History with Dr. Sasha Kovacs. This class explored theatre history through the lens of marginalized communities and provided students with an opportunity to conduct our own research. For my final project, I wrote a script in response to Herman Voaden's play *Hill-Land*. My goal was to take Voaden's characters, ideas, and inspirations and alter them to draw attention to the fundamentally colonial, misogynist, and homophobic nature of *Hill-Land*. This project would not have been possible without the resources provided by the University of Victoria's library which helped me delve deeper into the history of the play and examine alternative ways of responding to the Ontario "hill-land" which so inspired Voaden.

The single best resource I found to support this project was a book by Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. In *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance*, Simpson engages with Indigenous views on land which starkly contrast Voaden's emphasis on land as a possession. Simpson also touches on Nishnaabeg understanding of gender and sexuality which again contrast the rigid gender binary inhabited by Voaden's characters. Simpson writes of the importance of telling stories that draw in every member of our community, and this inspired me to write from my own knowledge of being female, queer, and foreign and longing to see myself represented in the plays I read (145).

Another interesting resource I used for this project was an interview of Willie James Jennings and Deanna Zantingh. I had heard of Jennings's work discussing Christianity's role in

colonialism, and several searches on the library website led me to this interview. Like Simpson, Jennings and Zantingh explore alternatives to the rigid binaries imposed by colonialism but through the lens of Christian European settlers. Since I am also a Christian European, it was important for me to examine this issue through scholars who share some of my history and complicit participation in colonialism.

This project also required me to find other sources that could illuminate Voaden's inspiration, intentions, and theory. Using the library's online databases, I was able to access scanned newspaper clippings referring to *Hill-Land's* very first performance. With help from Dr. Kovacs, I also found Voaden's own essay "Symphonic Expressionism or Notes on a New Theatre," which outlines his approach to performance and his invention of Symphonic Expressionism. These and other resources provided the base knowledge of Voaden's work I needed in order to parody it.

The UVic library plays a role in each of my classes, but my project on Voaden highlighted the importance of access to a variety of reputable sources. I was grateful to have found a range of authors, from Simpson, to Jennings and Zantingh, to Voaden himself, who could all showcase different facets of the themes of land ownership and colonialism I explored. As an added bonus, it was impactful to be able to access these sources online, which made learning during this pandemic just a little bit easier.

Works Cited

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