TARRAGON

THE MILLENNIAL MALCONTENT

By: **Erin Shields**
Directed by: **Peter Hinton**

February 28th – April 9th 2017 in the Mainspace
Opened Wednesday, March 8th, 2017

RESOURCE GUIDE

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The Millennial Malcontent Resource Guide

About the Play

Moxy is married and seething, fed up with the constraints of domesticity, and longing for some action. Meanwhile, her long-suffering husband Johnny has decided that enough is enough and contemplates having an affair with Faith, a secret admirer. Add to the mix a vain YouTube Star, his Québécois cousin, a lesbian party girl, a PhD student and a music blogger and the stage is set for a raucous exploration of the social posing, sexual frankness and emotional minefield of the Millennial generation.

This brand new play from Governor General's Award-winning playwright Erin Shields is a fierce meditation on the millennial generation, loosely adapted from *The Provoked Wife* by Sir John Vanbrugh.

About The Playwright

Erin Shields is a playwright and actor who trained at Rose Bruford College of Speech and Drama in London, England. She is a founding member of Groundwater Productions through which she creates, develops and produces much of her work. Her Governor General's Award winning play *If We Were Birds* was produced by Tarragon in 2010 and won two Dora Awards. It also eared the 2008 Summerworks Festival's Outstanding Production Award and has been translated into German as part of The German Theatre Exchange. Her other plays include *Montparnasse*, winner of the Alberta Theatre Projects' Enbridge playRites Award, Dora nominated *The Unfortunate Misadventures of Masha Galinski* and *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (Groundwater/Summerworks). Erin is currently developing plays for Tarragon, The Shaw Festival, Nightwood Theatre, Suitcase in Point and Groundwater Productions.

Definitions

Millennial

A millennial is a term given to define a current generation of people. There is some disagreement on when exactly the millennial generation begins, but it is generally agreed upon to be a person who is born between the early 80's and the early 2000's.

Bump, Philip. "Here is When Each Generation Begins and Ends, According to Facts." *The Atlantic,* 25 March, 2014. Web. Retrieved 28 February, 2017.

https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2014/03/here-is-when-each-generation-begins-and-ends-according-to-facts/359589/

Restoration Comedy

Restoration comedy first appeared in London during the Restoration period from 1660 to about 1700. It is also a period when women began to appear on the stage as actresses. "Restoration comedy relied upon sophisticated repartee and a knowledge of the exclusive code of manners in high society, the plots being based on the complex intrigues of the marriage-market." The plot and characters also included quite a bit of cynicism and wit, often adding to the humour and the complexity of the plot itself.

"Restoration Comedy." *Oxford Online,* n.d. Web. Retrieved 28 February, 2017.

http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100416239

Resources

The Provoked Wife

Vanbrugh, John, and James L. Smith. *The Provoked Wife*. London: A. & C. Black, 1993.

The Millennial Malcontent was loosely adapted from this is the 17th Century play. *The Provoked Wife* is about a woman, Lady Brute, who is in a loveless and abusive marriage. It explores the themes of love, sex, marriage, temptation, and revenge.

Millennials Rising

Howe, Neil & Strauss, William. *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation.* New York: Vintage Books, 2000.

Millennials Rising is written by authors who were some of the first to use the term 'millennial' in their work to describe this generation. "Over the next decade, the Millennial Generation will entirely recast the image of youth from downbeat and alienated to upbeat and engaged--with potentially seismic consequences for America."

Millennials: The Me Me Me Generation

http://time.com/247/millennials-the-me-me-me-generation/

This article appeared in a 2013 issue of Time Magazine. It paints a very thorough picture of millennials, and what defines them. It investigates both the positive and negative aspects of the culture in which they have grown up, and what that means for the future as they continue to navigate and balance their personal and work lives.

The Beta Marriage: How Millennials Approach 'I Do'

http://time.com/3024606/millennials-marriage-sex-relationships-hook-ups/

This Time Magazine article addresses what millennials think about marriage, and the trends that seem to be occurring with this generation. There seems to be a departure from traditional ideas of relationships, marriage, and fidelity. How are millennials approaching the subject of relationships in their already busy lives?

Millennials: Who They Are & Why We Hate Them

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-enHH-r_FM#t=1291.115076136

Scott Hess aims to fight the stereotype attributed to millennials that they are a lazy, disengaged, entitled generation. He instead argues that they are the same type of people from previous generations, but are dealing with a different set of circumstances.

Activities

Activity 1

Instructions: Pick one of the 4 quotes below that are spoken by characters in the play. Each of these quotes addresses the character's views on relationships with friends or lovers in their life. Write a short monologue on your own perspective of the quote you selected, or extend the character's thoughts through a monologue. You may draw on other events or characters in the play. When the monologues are written, choose a couple to share with the class.

"If we choose who we love, we're living to our greatest potential." (Faith)

"I can watch my friends fumble around without getting chewn up and spit out myself." (Teasel)

"It's hard to be a nice guy…I try to rely on honesty but it's more complicated than it seems." (Heartfree)

"(I) am experimenting with a radical new form of discourse I call: Talking Face to Face." (Teasel, in her note to Charm)

Activity 2

This is an assignment where most of the facilitated discussion will occur after it is done. Present this challenge to students: The next time they are hanging out with their friends

(perhaps during lunch, or when they're meeting up outside of school), see if they can go the entire time without using their cell phone. You can decide as a group what constitutes 'using' the phone. Is it leaving it in their bag, leaving it at home, or keeping everyone's phone on the table in a pile? After everyone has had time to do this, have a discussion about the experience. Some questions could be:

How long did you go without looking at your phone?
Was this assignment easy or hard for you? What was the hardest part?
Were you the only one not using your phone? If so, how did you feel if your friend started using theirs?
Did this change the types of discussions you were having with your friends? Did it change your level of engagement?
Is this something that you would consider doing again?
What do you think are the benefits of spending time away from technology such as your cell phone?

Discussion Questions

Pre-show

1. How much time do you spend on social media in an average day? How does this compare to the amount of time you spend engaging in face-to-face conversations?

2. Describe a time when you felt like you had to 'perform' a version of yourself in order to fit in, or get noticed. Was this 'performance' in person, or online?

3. "Everyone's just after their own happiness." Do you agree with this statement? If so, how far do you think one should to achieve their happiness if that is indeed their ultimate goal? At what cost might one's happiness come?

Post-show

1. Restoration dramas typically feature archetypes, which often have quite a lot to do with gender. Choose one character from *The Millennial Malcontent* and describe/explain how they are an archetype.

2. How does playwright Erin Shields confront or fight common gender stereotypes? Consider representations of male and female at their best and at their worst, and who in the play is performing those roles.

3. Many of these characters struggle with not being seen or heard. Why do you think this is so difficult for them? Does technology make this easier? Why or why not?

4. Do you think it's ethical for Charm and Mimi to be filming everything that they film in the play? Was there a point when you thought they went too far? Consider public versus private space both in reality and online.

5. Erin Shields writes "My goal with *The Millennial Malcontent* was to craft a contemporary restoration comedy that would speak directly to the social dynamics of our time in order to both reflect and critique the world we live in today." How does the play both reflect and critique the world we live in today?

6. At the end of the play, Moxy asks:

> *I wonder if marriage is some sort of radical proposal for our age.*
> *Instead of a shackling or a deadening*
> *or a sacrifice to the gods of capitalism,*
> *could marriage possibly be an antidote*
> *to instant gratification?*
>
> *A slow and steady deepening?*
> *An erosion of insecurity?*
> *A return to sensation?*
> *An admission of the endless confusion*
> *that takes us from day to day?*

What does she mean by this? Do you agree? Why or why not?

7. What do you think was the purpose of Charm's song at the end?

> *Everyone is happy.*
> *Everyone is fine.*
> *Everyone is posting things*
> *about having a fabulous time.*
>
> *Nobody's lonely.*
> *No one's upset.*
> *No one's expecting things*
> *to be constantly laced with regret.*
>
> *Sometimes I'm tempted*
> *to think the world is just unfair,*
> *to leave me stranded with my dreams*
> *and feeling unaware.*
> *I stare into the mirror*
> *and feel like a disgrace.*
> *It's then that I remember*

to take a photo of my face.

Because …

Everything is awesome.
Everything is cool.
Everything is happening
and nobody looks like a fool.

Everyone is happy.
Everyone is fine.
Everyone is posting things
on each other's things all the time.

EVERYONE IS HAPPY!

Discuss its placement at the end of the play, and what message it's trying to deliver. Can you relate to this in your own life?

8. Do you think technology has a positive effect on society? List both positive and negative effects that technology has on our lives today, compared to 30 years ago.

9. Should there be limits to access or use of technology in the world? What about school? What about in your own home?