

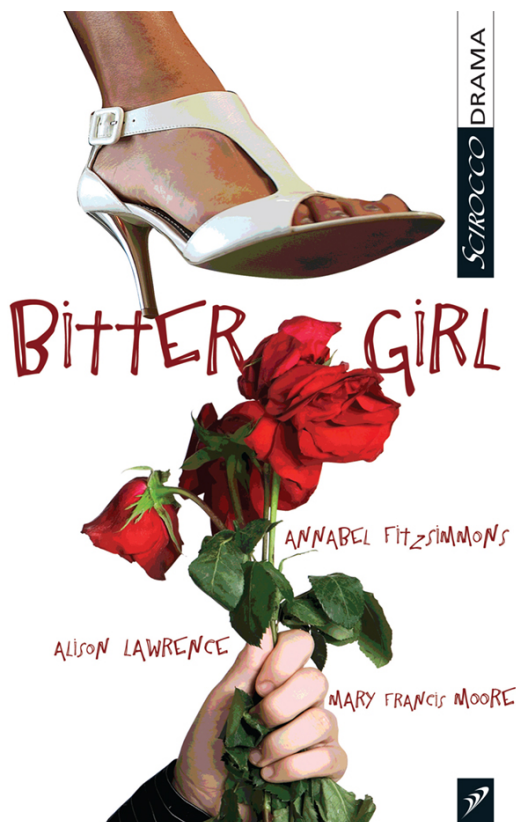


J. GORDON SHILLINGFORD

P U B L I S H I N G I N C

BOOKS THAT ENTERTAIN, EDUCATE, AND INSPIRE

ESSENTIAL READING



“A hyper-kinetic, interactive journey.”

— *National Post*

“A stylish, lively, and entertaining look at getting jilted.”

— *CBC Manitoba*

The phenomenon that is *Bittergirl* had three sold-out runs in Toronto, toured to London, England and played off-Broadway in NYC. The script has even more bittergirl wit and hard-won wisdom.

Bittergirl by [Annabel Fitzsimmons](#), [Alison Lawrence](#), and [Mary Francis Moore](#) charts the break-ups of three women—one single and dating, one co-habiting, one married with a child. This trio of Women Scorned experience heartbreak, hilarity, fairy tales gone wrong, tequila, Mounties, love, honour, car-keying, repeated viewings of *An Affair to Remember*,

fake spleenectomies, and meetings of Breakups Anonymous.

And then there are the men! The ones who want to alphabetize your CDs, the ones who give you shoelaces for your birthday. See the bittergirls list all of those things you should have told him the truth about. See Barbie and Ken break up! Laugh very hard.

[See More](#)

THE INTERVIEW

Santiago Guzmán is an award-winning playwright, dramaturge, performer, and director originally from Metepec, Mexico, now based in St. John's, NL. He is the Founder and Artistic Director of *TODOS Productions*, and Artistic Director for Playwrights Atlantic Resource Centre. Santiago's work is very gay, very brown, and very real.



Santiago, I'd like to start by asking you about your play **Altar**, which is about a young man who is trying to understand why his romantic relationship has ended. Over the course of the play, however, the story becomes larger than that, bringing in themes of love, culture, loss, and growth. Can you tell us more about **Altar**?

I started writing *Altar* in 2019 when I was still in theatre school out of sheer frustration of feeling like I was not being seen. When I was performing, I was constantly told that I had an accent (don't we all?), that I had a different skin colour than my peers, and that there were no parts for me to play in the local theatre scene. I was told that Newfoundland and Labrador theatre was about the place's history and its people. However, the stories of

people like me, those who do not “fit” with so-called tradition were nowhere to be seen. So, I had to write my own. I wanted this play to meet me at my intersections, me being a racialized, queer, migrant ESL person in NL.

As an unashamed hopeless romantic, I wanted to write a play about my experience with dating and ghosting, and I thought the festivity of the Day of the Dead was the perfect entry point for those who were a bit familiar with my culture—and my favourite Mexican tradition! See? Intersections.

Altar had its world premiere in 2021 with the Resource Centre for the Arts Theatre Company and toured across high schools in Newfoundland and Labrador as a digital offering (we shot it like a movie, and it was soooo fun.) I’ve been lucky to have taken this same production on tour for national presentations at the Prismatic Arts Festival, (NS) and Aluna Theatre’s RUTAS Festival (ON) in 2022, a summer presentation at the Gros Morne Theatre Festival with TNL in 2023, an Atlantic Canadian tour in 2024, as well as a performance at the SpotOn Festival in Lancashire (UK). *Altar* received a second production by Theatre New Brunswick in the winter of 2023 and toured schools in their province.

You’ve been quoted as saying, “*I think at the core of my values as an artist is advancing community. How can I encourage others to carve space for themselves through theatre and storytelling?*” Can you expand on that?

The first workshop production of *Altar* at the Annual St. John’s Short Play Festival gave birth to my theatre company, TODOS Productions. With this special presentation of my first play, I learned that this story was raising other emerging artists in NL, while also introducing local audiences to culturally diverse narratives. I thought that TODOS could also serve to uplift Black, Indigenous, Artists of Colour, 2SLGBTQAI+ artists, landed immigrants, and artists with disabilities within Newfoundland and Labrador.

Over the years, I have come to understand and appreciate *why* I write plays: I want to speak to the people in NL that historically have been silenced or ignored. I intend my stories to resonate with audiences in my community who struggle to be seen and heard, but *also* to provide paid and professional opportunities to equity-owed artists in my community who can grow with the production of my shows.

Your play *Urn* deals with siblings who are grappling with their mother’s death, and also with their differing concepts of “home.” I know that you have put down deep roots in St. John’s, Newfoundland and Labrador. When you decided to leave Mexico, why did you choose to move to NL? What do you love about the place?

2025 will mark the tenth anniversary of my arrival in Canada. I always say that landing in NL was a happy mistake. When I embraced the idea of pursuing professional training in theatre creation abroad, Canada seemed to be a great place to live, based on the idea I had of this country. I found a university in NL that offered a Bachelor's Degree in Fine Arts in Theatre and, at the time, was affordable to my family finances. So I took the chance,

applied to uni, and got in. I have to confess two things: 1) I had no backup plan if this didn't work, and 2) I thought leaving Mexico would be best because I was so afraid of failure. You see, I started performing when I was eight years old, everyone back in Mexico knew I was "the theatre kid," and I was so afraid that I hadn't gotten into the National Theatre School of Mexico, the most prestigious way to achieve theatre education in the big city. I thought of applying somewhere where they didn't know me, so if I failed my audition, at least nobody would know me.

Upon arrival to Newfoundland and Labrador, I was met with warmth, love, and appreciation. And, although I had no intention of staying in Canada upon graduation, this place grew on me and made me feel it could become home. And it has.

The people. The people have kept me here.

You've received several awards, including the John Palmer Award for being a changemaker in the theatre world, the Inspired Innovation Award from the St. John's YWCA, and the Senior Dramatic Script Award at the Newfoundland and Labrador 2024 Arts and Letters Awards for your new play, *Seis Grados en Mayo*. Can you give us a sneak peek of the new work?

In *Seis Grados en Mayo*, Mexico City meets St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. After not seeing her son Carlos for almost five years, María visits him in Canada to celebrate his graduation and help him pack to return home. Carlos has other plans in mind. He has to find a way to tell his mother that St. John's will be his new home... indefinitely.

This play was inspired by having my dad come to my graduation back in 2019 and seeing Newfoundland and Labrador for the first time. I think it was then, when he understood why I had fallen in love with this place and saw how loved I was here, that he trusted me with my decision to stay. It was too cold, though.

This play is fully in Spanglish and it's quite physical. A Spanglish Canadian farce if you will.

Recently, you were chosen by the Canadian Museum of Immigration to be their Winter 2025 Playwright in Residence. What sorts of things will you be doing in that capacity?

The main focus of the residency is to support the writing of my newest play *long-distance-short*, a play that explores the intersection between my fear of long-distance relationships and my fear of spiders. Through the residency, I will hold informal coffee houses at the museum for community members to drop by and learn about my process, and to write together (especially when writing can feel like a very solitary endeavour). My residency will culminate with a public reading of the latest draft of the script, as a sneak peek into my process of writing a play! This will help me gauge the potential impact and/or areas of interest from my audience that will inform my next steps in pursuing this play.

Finally, do you have any advice for aspiring playwrights?

Write your story. Don't give up. If you are passionate about your play, someone else will be too.

[Read the Full Interview](#)

BEHIND THE SCENES



This month JGS talked with Megan Dart, Executive Director of the [Edmonton International Fringe Festival](#).

Megan has worked in festival and event production, arts admin, theatre creation, public relations, and communications. She loves fringing with her whole dang heart.

The [Edmonton International Fringe Festival](#) is the largest and longest-running fringe theatre festival in North America. Can you give us a brief overview of the festival?

The Edmonton Fringe first burst onto the scene in 1982. And since then, as you've mentioned, we've become the largest, longest-running Fringe Theatre Festival in North America. Every year, we welcome more than 750,000 site visits over the eleven days of Festival. We engage more than 1,600 artists from right here in Edmonton, across Canada, and around the world. Last year, I believe we had fourteen countries represented at the Festival, which is always exciting. That of course includes our 200-plus theatre productions that happen inside our venues across the city. We also bring incredible street performers from around the world to activate our outdoor site.

We offer a free music series; last year we had eighteen free concerts over the eleven days of Festival that featured artists from here in Edmonton, the incredible talent that we have here. We also had a great partnership with Music Yukon, where we brought six touring acts from the north to come and perform on our stage.

And then the heart of our festival, something that is so near and dear to my heart personally, is KidsFringe. We offer a free festival-within-a-festival for our littlest Fringers, 12

and under. That event itself offers about 300 free programs, workshops, performances, and hands-on opportunities, and sees about 13,000 visits.

Of course, the most important piece, none of this would be possible without the 1,000 volunteers who offer their time, their skills, their hearts, and their passion every single year to lift up the small village to make the festival happen. We are so grateful for all the ways they support us throughout the year! We have about 250 staff who make the festival possible; we grow from a small year-round team of about twenty to more than 250 skilled arts workers—everything from managing our site to supporting our programming and our artists to making sure our volunteers feel engaged. It is truly like building a small city within a city every year.

I know that you host events year-round. Can you tell us a little bit about your other programming?

We never slow down over here! The Fringe Theatre Arts Barns venue is home to more than 500 events throughout the year. That includes everything from eight to ten small to mid-size festivals that we support through our infrastructure, to supporting incredibly well-established arts organizations like the Edmonton Opera, which rehearses in our space. Northern Light Theatre, of course, has been producing here for a long time. Common Ground Arts Society, and Azimuth Theatre are incredible partners of ours. Truly, we provide space and resources to independent artists who don't have access to bricks-and-mortar creation space, to high school band competitions, to professional theatre companies who are a vital part of the Edmonton ecology. We take a lot of pride in supporting that work and in playing an important role in providing a safe, clean, professionally equipped space. You know, we have three beautiful theatres in the Arts Barns. We have two studios, and then we run our little Fringe Grounds Café that we'd like to refer to as a loiter-positive space. (You don't have to spend money to be here. In fact, we really want you to come in and plug in your laptop and work on that next grant application, or finish that script, or hold your production meeting. It's an invitation for the arts community to come in and take over this space.) As a cornerstone arts organization, we have so much to offer, and genuinely, we just want to kick open the doors and give it all away.

On top of that, we do also produce our own curated season outside of festival. Our artistic director, Murray Utas, works really closely with the local community. We meet artists local to Edmonton at that moment in their career where they want to take a big risk on something. So maybe the show has outgrown Fringe Festival because of course we know the festival has wild constraints; you have fifteen minutes to set up and fifteen minutes to strike at the end of each performance. And you try to run in that 60 to 75-minute sweet spot. The season is a chance for our artists to breathe, to take advantage of the great resources we have here, and to experiment wildly—to think about what that next step in their career might be. On average, we have three shows a season that we support.

We steward a number of awards throughout the year, and one of them is a beautiful award called the Westbury Family Fringe Theatre Award that provides about \$35,000 of in-kind support to a new work that's presented as part of our season. It's pretty darn incredible and

we are very grateful to Dr. Bob Westbury, of course, a philanthropist who passionately supported Fringe for more than 25 years. He and his wife, Dr. Marilyn Westbury, helped us establish that award in 2017. It's just one way that we're able to give back to the community outside of the festival.

We have a big focus on mentorship. We believe in mentorship at all levels. We run something called the Human Library, where folks can come in and they can take a human out of our library and get some mentorship. We'll take care of the coffee, and we'll pair you with someone who can support you in whatever it is that you're interested in learning more about. For example, if you want some mentorship in writing a grant, I am super happy to go sit down with you for an hour and go over your grant and talk about strategies. Murray, our artistic director, can come and talk to you about creating a supportive rehearsal process. We have an incredible number of stage managers on our team who are always willing to talk about the importance of the stage management role. We really look at fostering opportunities for connection, for collaboration, making sure that that we are really playing an active part in the health of the local arts ecology.

[Read the Full Interview](#)

LOVE LOST AND FOUND



COMING ATTRACTIONS

• IN THEATRES •

The Secret to Good Tea by Rosanna Deerchild
[Grand Theatre](#), London, ON, February 18–March 8, 2025.

Casey and Diana by Nick Green
[Theatre Aquarius](#), Hamilton, ON, February 19–March 8, 2025

The New Canadian Curling Club by Mark Crawford
[Neptune Theatre](#), Halifax, NS, February 25–March 23, 2025.

Performance Review by Rosamund Small
[Outside the March](#), February 27–March 23, 2025.

No Big Deal by Michael Kras
[Roseneath Theatre](#), Touring ON, Spring 2025.

Bed and Breakfast by Mark Crawford
[Theatre Orangeville](#), Orangeville, ON, March 13–30, 2025.

Casey and Diana by Nick Green
[Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre](#), Winnipeg, MB, March 19–April 12, 2025.

Feast by Guillermo Verdecchia
[Tarragon Theatre](#), Toronto, ON, April 1–27, 2025.

Casey and Diana by Nick Green
[Neptune Theatre](#), Halifax, NS, April 22–May 18, 2025.

Casey and Diana by Nick Green
[Arts Club Theatre](#), Vancouver, BC, April 24–May 25, 2025.

The Runner by Christopher Morris
[Harold Green Jewish Theatre](#), North York, ON, April 26–May 4, 2025.

I'm in Love with Your Sister by Norm Foster
[Theatre Orangeville](#), Orangeville, ON, May 1–18, 2025.

Macbeth: A Tale Told by an Idiot by Eric Woolfe
[Eldritch Theatre](#), Toronto, ON, May 7–18, 2025.

After the Rain by Rose Napoli and Suzy Wilde
[Tarragon Theatre](#), Toronto, ON, May 27–June 22, 2025.

Serving Elizabeth (Reading) by Marcia Johnson
[New Stages](#), Peterborough, ON, June 14, 2025.

With Love and a Major Organ by Julia Lederer

Starring Anna Maguire, Hamza Haq, and Veena Sood. Finalist for the Grand Jury Prize, 2023 Nashville Film Festival, winner Best Feature Film, Reelworld Film Festival, winner, Best Feature, Canadian Film Festival. Available to rent or buy on Google Play, AppleTV or Amazon Prime.

The Swearing Jar by Kate Hewlett

Starring Adelaide Clemens, Douglas Smith, Patrick J. Adams, and Kathleen Turner. Now streaming on Amazon Prime!

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