

Problem Child



by

George F. Walker

A Playgoer's Companion

"First and foremost, an audience wants to be connected . . . They connect emotionally. . . . I want to make sure they have a pulse. I don't want the intellectual approach to my work that I think is a big deal in Canadian theatre."

-- George F. Walker



The Author

George F. Walker was born August 23rd, 1947 in Toronto's East End working class district. He had an unusual rise to prominence in the theatre world. Originally a taxi

driver in downtown Toronto, he caught wind that The Factory Theatre Company was looking for new and original authors. The first play he submitted, was accepted. Since then, he has won the Governor General's Award three times, and has five Dora Mavor Moore Awards, and nine Chalmers Awards (the latest for *The End of Civilization* from the *Suburban Motel* series). His plays have been performed across Canada as well as in the United States, Germany, Australia, and New Zealand. They have been translated into German, French, Hebrew, Turkish, Polish and Czech. He is currently working on a number of projects, and has written for several Canadian television productions, most notably "Due South," "The Newsroom," "This is Wonderland," and "The Line." Mr. Walker has three children and lives in Toronto with his second wife, actor Susan Purdy.

Walker and the Factory Theatre Lab

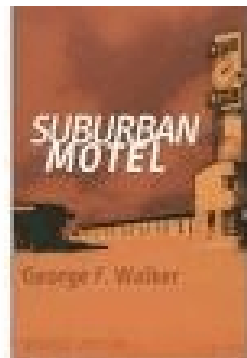
Toronto's Factory Theatre Lab was the first English-language theatre in Canada to devote itself exclusively to Canadian scripts. It was launched on 1 May 1970 by founding director Ken Gass, who sensed it was time for Canadian theatres to shake off colonialist influences and produce Canadian work. When Walker heard that the Factory Theatre was looking for new, fresh playwrights, he took the opportunity to send in one of the first plays he had written, *The Prince of Naples*. It was accepted and was performed by the theatre company in 1972. This was the first installment in a long, productive collaboration between the Factory Theatre and Walker. The theatre survived precariously for a quarter century, and eventually, partly because of the

success in 1997-98 of *Suburban Motel*, in the fall of that year the theatre was able to buy the building it had leased for 14 years, and to embark on a vigorous and successful fund-raising campaign. (adapted from the Canadian Theatre Encyclopedia)

The *Suburban Motel* series

Problem Child is the first of Walker's *Suburban Motel* series, six plays all taking place in the same seedy motel room. Each play stands alone, although some characters do pop up in more than one. Walker has said that he plans to create more plays for the *Suburban Motel* collection. The series began as one play, *Problem Child*, but once the play was finished he was inspired to continue using the same setting. He found the experience “incredibly liberating, because I don’t have to recreate the world. The world is that room, and there’s nothing between me and the characters, no narrative pressure, because the story is only what happens in that room. It can’t be anything else.”

As Chris Johnson observes in his *Essays on George F. Walker: Playing with Anxiety*, “the motel is a kind of neutral space: virtually anybody can walk through that door. But the sort of neighbourhood in which Walker’s motel is located is not a vacation spot, and this is not the sort of motel to which vacationers would go, for a holiday, or to stop between home and a resort destination. . . . the motel’s detachment from the usual routine, from either home or place of work, makes it ‘carnavalesque’ in that behaviour which would not be ‘allowed’ elsewhere is permitted here. All the characters regard the place they are in as the locus of a temporary state of affairs, and almost all come to the motel because they are looking for futures better in some way than their desperate presents. They all fail. They are all ‘on the edge,’ on the outskirts of life as well as of the city.”



Walker and “Black comedy”

Problem Child is a part of the genre known as dark comedy or black comedy. Black comedy commonly utilizes topics and events that are usually regarded as taboo and are treated in a satirical or humorous manner while retaining their seriousness. A playwright can use black comedy as a tool for exploring important issues by combining amusement, discomfort, and serious thought in their play. Some popular themes of the genre include rape, murder, suicide, war, drug abuse, terminal illness, abuse, insanity, disease, racism, disability, both physical and mental, chauvinism and crime. (Adapted from wikipedia)

“Walker is a masterful playwright, with perfect pitch for the language of losers and of the sanctimonious professionals intending to help them. Both frightening and funny, the play runs on a rich fuel of black-comic surprise” – San Francisco Bay *Guardian*

This document was researched by
The *Problem Child* Task Force:

Laura Graham, Liz McCabe, Cathy Doucette, Dusty Green,
and Brooke McGovern

and assembled and edited by the Editorial Team:
Charles Lindsay, Ang Moore, Michelle Chisholm, Ben
Savoie, Michael Woodside, and Russ Hunt

English 2223: The Page and the Stage
St. Thomas University

visit our Web site, at
<http://people.stu.ca/~hunt/22230910>