

The December Man



(L'homme de décembre)

by Colleen Murphy

“I like to write the kind of theatre that I like to go and see because when I put my money down I want to go and have some kind of emotional experience,” says Murphy. “I want to be riveted, disturbed, like punched-out or mentally engaged, but I always want my heart engaged.”

– *A Playgoer's Companion* –

Background

The École Polytechnique Massacre, also known as the Montréal Massacre, occurred on December 6, 1989 at the École Polytechnique in Montréal. Twenty-five-year-old Marc Lépine shot twenty-eight people before killing himself. He began his attack by entering a classroom at the university, where he separated the male and female students. After claiming that he was "fighting feminism," he shot all nine women in the room, killing six. During the course of the next hour, fourteen female engineering students lost their lives. He then moved through corridors, the cafeteria, and another classroom, specifically targeting women to shoot, before turning the gun on himself. It was the first school shooting in Canadian history and began the implementation of the stricter gun regulations you see today and new policies on how school shootings are dealt with by the police.

The author



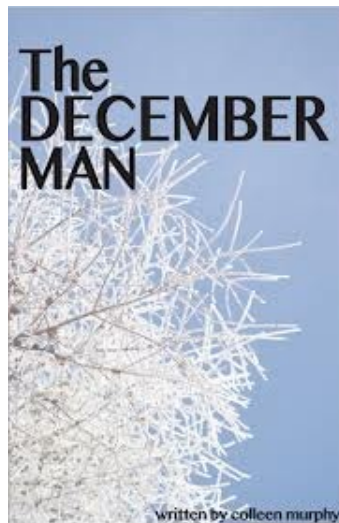
Colleen Murphy was born in Rouyn-Noranda, Quebec and grew up in Northern Ontario. She studied acting at Ryerson University and at the Strasberg Institute in New York. Her radio drama *Fire Engine Red* won third prize in the CBC Literary Competition in 1985, and that same year she was invited to join the Playwrights Unit at Tarragon Theatre. In 1987 Tarragon produced her first play *All Other Destinations Are Cancelled*. Murphy subsequently left theatre to pursue film. She directed her first short film *Putty Worm* which premiered at the 1993 International Toronto Film Festival. Her second short, *The Feeler*, played at film festivals around the world. In 1996, the Artistic Director of Necessary Angel Theatre invited Murphy to become one of three Playwrights-in-Residence. She returned to the theatre with a new play, *The December Man (L'homme de décembre)*, which won the 2006

Enbridge playwrights Award. The play premiered at Alberta Theatre Projects at the Enbridge playwrights Festival of New Canadian Plays in February 2007. It has been translated into French and German. [Adapted from Colleen Murphy's official website]

About the play

First produced in 2006, *The December Man* has, for the most part, received high praise from audiences and critics alike, touted by Playwrights Canada as a "searing drama on courage, heroism, and despair (that) explores the long private shadow that public violence casts." Writers at [Torontostage.com](http://torontostage.com) have remarked that Murphy's profound, emotion-heavy narrative is "powerful . . . She has the playwriting prowess of a classical writer." (Toronto Stage.com) Since its debut, *The December Man* has been awarded the prestigious Governor General's Literary Award for Drama (2007) and the CAA Carol Bolt Award (2008) *The December Man* has received praise from critics such as Playwrights Canada with quotes like "searing drama on courage, heroism, and despair (that) explores the long private shadow that public violence casts." and general high praise from audiences.

It's difficult to review this play without revealing its central climactic elements but if you have an appetite for tragedy you should experience this remarkable work for yourself. We get glimpses of Christmas and Easter in the lives of these Catholics, but the play offers little cheer or sense of resurrection. It's a wintry, brutal December that the massacre blows through the characters' souls. [Adapted from the Toronto Stage and *The Vancouver Play* review]



Synopsis

The show moves backwards in time, chronicling the tale of a family torn apart by the 1989 Montréal Massacre. Incidents like this create immediate victims, but what of those who live on with the guilt, rage and frustration of such a random and senseless tragedy? The play expertly analyzes the long private shadow that public violence casts over some of the most unsuspecting victims. Jean and his parents, Kathleen and Benoît struggle to find consolation for their grief and pain. Kathleen nags Jean to focus on his studies; his father urges him to let go, to know it wasn't his fault. But Jean can't stop the nightmares. He wakes up screaming to the women inside his head, "Run!" He takes karate lessons so that he'd have the courage to fight if it happened again. But they're not enough to end his self-loathing, his feeling of being "a tiny frightened insect." Neither Kathleen's religious faith nor Benoît's grounded common sense can keep them from cracking under the horrible strain. Offering little analysis of why such tragedies occur or how they might be avoided, *The December Man* gives us simply the acute anatomy of a nightmare. [Adapted from *The December Man script* and *The Vancouver Play* review]

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