

The Occupation of Heather Rose

Wendy Lill



Two epigraphs that frame *The Occupation of Heather Rose*, one from *Alice in Wonderland* and the other from *Heart of Darkness*, prepare the audience for the nightmare of dislocation and alienation this one-woman show evokes. Young, naive, and inadequately trained, urban health care/social worker Heather Rose flirts with the pilot as she wings her way north in a bush plane, to land in an isolated and remote northern/Native community, carrying her Canada Food Guides, plans for fitness classes and community social activities with her. She is met, when she lands, with what she initially perceives as a careless disrespect for anything she has understood to date of culture and civilization. The destitute, wretched and alienated Native population she has been sent to move forward meet her bright imperial gaze with the blank stares that arise from relentless years of exploitation and broken promises. Nine months later Heather Rose is bushed--utterly disillusioned by the growing horror of her new-found realization that what her culture has to offer this community: the alcohol bootlegged in by the charming bush pilot the unsuitable clothing sold by the thoughtless proprietor of the general store the gasoline used as much by the youth of the community to get high as to afford them access to what has become the tractless wilderness they inhabit she finally understands is less than nothing--total dependency. She returns, compelled, like Marlowe in *Heart of Darkness* to tell her story to others--like her missing supervisor, whose empty office she occupies on her return, illustrating her monologue of despair on a blackboard to an absent colonial authority for which the audience stands in as its silent and complicit witness.

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