

SEEDS  
GRAINS



Photo: Maxime Côté

Écrite à partir de la transcription du procès et du verbatim d'entrevues, *Grains* recrée sur le vif la bataille historique opposant la multinationale Monsanto à Percy Schmeiser, un fermier de Saskatchewan. En 1998, Schmeiser était accusé d'avoir planté sans en régler la note les grains de canola brevetés de la grande firme de biotechnologie. Soumis à la Cour Suprême du Canada en 2004, le conflit a allumé dans le champ des OGM un feu de brousse qui s'est propagé mondialement et a fait de Percy Schmeiser le porte-étendard des cultivateurs.

*Grains* touche l'un des enjeux cruciaux de notre époque : l'usage de grain modifié partout dans le monde joue l'avenir dans notre assiette.

*GRAINS*, version française de *SEEDS*  
UNE PIÈCE D'ANNABEL SOUTAR  
TRADUCTION : FANNY BRITT  
MISE EN SCÈNE : CHRIS ABRAHAM



## SEEDS au FESTIVAL TRANSAMÉRIQUES

« *Simplement brillant* »



Photo : Maxime Côté

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Festival TransAmériques - 7, 8 juin, 19h, 9 juin 2012, 16h

#### Critique

par David Lefebvre

La compagnie de théâtre documentaire Porte Parole voit le jour en 2000 et propose *Novembre*, une pièce qui rapporte les mots de dizaines de Québécois recueillis de la Gaspésie jusqu'en Estrie, en rapport avec les élections provinciales de 1998. Depuis, Porte Parole touche à de multiples thèmes sociaux : la santé, la sous-traitance, les immigrants, et plus récemment, les infrastructures et la responsabilité civile, avec le triptyque *Sexy Béton*, présenté au Centre Segal et à Fred-Barry. La force de Porte Parole se trouve dans sa capacité de rendre vivants les témoignages des différentes personnes interviewées, en créant une dramaturgie du réel, tout en manipulant celui-ci pour mieux l'expliquer et approfondir les nombreux questionnements qui en découlent.

L'auteure montréalaise Annabel Soutar s'attaque, avec le projet *Seeds*, au procès opposant la multinationale Monsanto au fermier saskatchewanais Percy Schmeiser. Monsanto l'accuse d'avoir utilisé des graines de canola génétiquement modifiées, brevetées par elle et résistantes à l'herbicide Roundup - un produit développé, d'ailleurs, par la firme biotechnologique - sans en payer les frais. Si le fermier clame que les pousses ont crû par accident sur ses trois acres de terrain, la compagnie tente de prouver le contraire. Monsanto remportera le procès, sans pourtant prouver hors de tout doute que Schmeiser s'est procuré de façon illégitime le canola en question. Le vieil agriculteur, projeté à l'avant-scène, deviendra une figure emblématique de la lutte des fermiers indépendants contre la multinationale, et le conflit, amené jusqu'en Cour Suprême en 2004, placera les OGM (organismes génétiquement modifiés) au cœur des préoccupations de plusieurs Canadiens et Canadiennes.

Avec *Seeds*, Annabel Soutar démontre une fois de plus son immense talent d'auteure et peint une fresque dense, mais animée et passionnante, inspirée par les verbatim du procès et par plusieurs entrevues réalisées avec Schmeiser, Trish Jordan de Monsanto, des scientifiques canadiens et américains, des employés gouvernementaux et des avocats. Soutar donne ainsi une voix à toutes ces personnes, qu'elles soutiennent ou non la cause du fermier des Prairies. Car, plus la pièce évolue, plus on sent que rien n'est ni noir, ni blanc. On peut critiquer, certes, l'éthique de la compagnie, mais qui dit que Schmeiser n'a pas menti sur la provenance des semences? Et la tribune qu'il détient depuis, à raison ou à tort, fait un mal irréparable à l'entreprise. Les propos recueillis par la narratrice, l'alter ego de l'auteure (un ajout majeur à la production, qui se distingue par le fait même de la première version de la pièce, datant de 2005), chez les voisins et les habitants de Bruno, en Saskatchewan, ne sont guère reluisants et jette un ombrage défavorable sur l'agriculteur. L'histoire se complexifie de manière exponentielle ; au lieu de chasser l'ambiguïté du revers de la main et prendre parti, Annabel Soutar entretient le doute pour que l'auditoire puisse réfléchir et se fasse sa propre idée. Car, finalement, tout est une question de perception. Si le premier acte se concentre sur le procès de la fin des années 90, le deuxième questionne de façon beaucoup plus large : qu'est-ce que la vie ? À qui appartient-elle? Quels sont les dangers ou les réels impacts des OGM? Si aucune réponse n'est avancée, plusieurs pistes sont à la portée des spectateurs.

La mise en scène de Chris Abraham se veut sophistiquée, mais jamais lourde, aux notes d'humour rafraichissantes. Un immense écran rectangulaire propose des images préenregistrées et captées en direct de la salle par deux caméras. Le plateau, lors de la première partie, se veut chargé, mélangeant les meubles d'une maison de campagne aux accessoires de laboratoire de recherche. Lors de la seconde partie, l'équipe dégagera l'espace de jeu en ne conservant qu'une table et quelques chaises. En ouvrant ainsi la scène, l'histoire prend une certaine envergure, se dirigeant vers l'international, et permet aux questionnements plus philosophiques d'entrer en jeu. Durant tout le spectacle, on n'hésite aucunement à s'adresser au public en l'interrogeant ou en lui parlant directement ; il est ainsi toujours interpellé, au cœur de la présente création.

*Seeds* échappe à ces documentaires accusatoires en tentant de balancer plus ou moins également les différentes opinions des partis en cause. Chaque prise de parole par les protagonistes se veut importante, intéressante, et l'idée de créer des mises en abîme et des confrontations entre les personnages qui n'ont, à priori, aucun rapport entre eux, ajoute un dynamisme salutaire et un suspense excitant à l'entreprise. Si tous les comédiens sont d'une grande justesse, et ce, dans la peau de tous leurs personnages, Tanja Jacobs se démarque en avocate de la défense qu'on adore détester et David Ferry (qui remplaçait Eric Peterson pour le FTA) est renversant dans le rôle de Schmeiser. La jolie Liisa Repo-Martell, jouant avec naturel la sympathique narratrice enceinte de quelques mois - une autre sorte de semence, cette vie qui surprend toujours - crée le lien émotif parfait dans ce dédale scientifique et judiciaire.

L'écriture de Soutar et la mise en scène d'Abraham se veulent claires, précises, captivantes. Sans verser dans la controverse, en multipliant les points de vue et sans prendre réellement position, le duo réussit à résumer et à rendre accessible une histoire d'une jolie complexité, tout en abordant des thèmes plus généraux de grande importance : la résistance, la contamination biologique et intellectuelle, l'impact et la responsabilité des grandes entreprises sur nos vies, la conscience sociale et environnementale. Simplement brillant; un genre de théâtre que l'on aimerait voir plus souvent sur nos scènes parfois ennuyeuses ou trop conventionnelles.



Photo : Maxime Côté



## Grain(s) : Du bon théâtre engagé

Michel Vaïs

Il y a diverses façons de rendre compte d'une pièce de théâtre documentaire. Le genre encourage les analyses sur les questions de fond: ici, la lutte épique d'un producteur de canola contre la multinationale Monsanto. Très documenté, basé sur des entretiens véritables, le texte témoigne d'une recherche sérieuse menée par Annabel Soutar pendant neuf ans (!). La durée de la pièce (2h35, avec entracte) souligne la complexité de la situation. Sans être un spécialiste des OGM, on ne peut manquer d'être impressionné par l'enquête de l'auteure, qui a enregistré des témoignages aussi bien au Canada qu'aux États-Unis et qui a compulsé les volumineux jugements rendus.



(...)

Le vrai défi consistait évidemment à rendre théâtral ce flot d'information et à éviter le didactisme. Dans cette troisième mouture de la pièce – la première en français –, l'auteure se place elle-même au centre de l'action par l'entremise de la comédienne Christine Beaulieu, très crédible dans ce rôle de jeune fouineuse. Quant à l'agriculteur, c'est Guy Thauvette qui le campe avec une grande maestria. Les autres comédiens jouent en français avec aisance et naturel. Mais le metteur en scène a surtout su exploiter une théâtralité qui évite que l'on s'ennuie (trop). Un claquement bien sonore par ci, un sac de semences tombant abruptement du plafond par là, un grand écran au fond pour nous jouer les lénifiantes publicités de Monsanto tiennent le spectateur en éveil.



Le jeu, surtout, est convaincant. Le naturel et les hésitations de Thauvette, l'aplomb des nombreux personnages composés souvent avec humour par les autres comédiens (avocats, experts, livreurs, chercheurs, journalistes), tous jouant avec rythme et un plaisir évident, finissaient par gagner l'attention, apparemment sans effort. Du bon théâtre engagé, c'est-à-dire, qui fait réfléchir en divertissant.



Source :

<http://www.revuejeu.org/critiques/michel-vaïs/grains-du-bon-theatre-engage>

## L'appât du grain : un combat contre Monsanto porté à la scène

Le jeudi 6 septembre 2012

(...)

Qualifiant l'œuvre de théâtre documentaire, nos deux critiques disent avoir apprécié le côté fort détaillé de *GRAIN(s)*. Nathalie Petrowski voit là une continuité dans le travail d'Annabel Soutar. « Elle réussit à rendre ça divertissant. Il y a des grands bouts de textes très, très didactiques, mais par l'humour, elle réussit à rendre le sujet intéressant », note la journaliste.

Éric Darier estime que la pièce montre bien la dualité entre la tradition agricole et la réalité plus commerciale des cultivateurs modernes. « Ce que ça montre, c'est qu'il est impossible de comprendre cet univers d'un angle strictement commercial », dit-il.



©Radio-Canada/Olivier Lalande | La journaliste Nathalie Petrowski et Éric Darier, responsable de campagne en agriculture et OGM à Greenpeace international

Évidemment, *GRAIN(s)* n'est pas sans provoquer chez le spectateur une réflexion sur l'état de notre alimentation. La pièce expose aussi le parcours paradoxal de Percy Schmeiser, le fermier au centre de l'affaire. (...)

[Écoutez la critique de la pièce \*GRAIN\(s\)\* par Nathalie Petrowski et Éric Darier](#)

## Annabel Soutar : femme de combat

Le mercredi 29 août 2012

Dans le paysage théâtral montréalais, Annabel Soutar est la seule à se consacrer au théâtre documentaire avec autant de ferveur. Sa manière? Réaliser des entrevues et puiser dans les journaux et les documents officiels pour dénicher une matière dramatique forte, qui pose de grandes questions sur les enjeux sociaux. Dans *Grain(s)*, version française de *Seeds*, elle s'intéresse au combat d'un fermier de Saskatchewan contre la multinationale Monsanto.

[Écoutez l'entrevue avec Annabel Soutar](#)

Sources :

[http://www.radio-canada.ca/emissions/medium\\_large/2011-2012/chronique.asp?idChronique=242432](http://www.radio-canada.ca/emissions/medium_large/2011-2012/chronique.asp?idChronique=242432)  
[http://www.radio-canada.ca/emissions/plus\\_on\\_est\\_de\\_fous\\_plus\\_on\\_lit/2012-2013/chronique.asp?idChronique=241090](http://www.radio-canada.ca/emissions/plus_on_est_de_fous_plus_on_lit/2012-2013/chronique.asp?idChronique=241090)

## Théâtre - Ce n'est jamais simple

[Alexandre Cadieux](#)



Photo : Maxime Côté

Grain(s) relate la bataille judiciaire qui a opposé Monsanto et le fermier saskatchewanais Percy Schmeiser.

« Les gens préfèrent les histoires simples », a répondu le scientifique américain Barry Commoner à la dramaturge Annabel Soutar qui le questionnait sur l'adhésion instantanée de la communauté scientifique à la théorie de la structure de l'ADN proposée par Watson et Crick en 1953. Commode et élégante, la double hélice possédait la qualité de se présenter comme une entreprise parfaitement régulée, compartimentée et productive. Depuis, quelques voix dissidentes ont remis en cause ce modèle : la vie ne saurait être réduite à une formule si parfaite, ce qu'illustre avec beaucoup d'à-propos la nouvelle production de Porte Parole, Grain(s), qui débutait mardi dernier à la Licorne. (...)

À l'heure des réseaux sociaux et du partage à haute vitesse d'informations contradictoires et rarement neutres, Porte Parole vient nous rappeler avec *Grain(s)* qu'un engagement artistique peut signifier à la fois vigilance et compassion tout en mettant en avant la pluralité sans pour autant prétendre à une lisse objectivité. Parce que la vérité, tout comme l'humain, n'est jamais simple.

Source :

<http://www.ledevoir.com/culture/theatre/358816/theatre-ce-n-est-jamais-simple>

## Grain(s): champ de bataille

[Luc Boulanger](#)



Photo : Maxime Côté

Le sujet touche à l'éthique scientifique et à l'insatiable soif de gains et de profits des humains.

(...)

### David et Goliath

L'origine du contentieux entre ce David de la terre et ce Goliath du capital : des grains de canola génétiquement modifiés et brevetés que le fermier aurait illégalement plantés. Ce dernier plaide que son champ a été contaminé par des semences emportées par le vent ou déversées accidentellement par des camions...

Le sujet est énorme, voire complexe. Il touche à l'éthique scientifique et à l'insatiable soif de gains et de profits des humains. (...)

«Pour moi, les mots sont comme des empreintes digitales», dit le personnage de l'auteure dans *Grain(s)*. Avec son texte, Annabel Soutar sème une importante réflexion sur le sens à donner à la vie. Et nous invite à réfléchir au précieux et fragile héritage que nous laisserons quand celle-ci nous aura fait signe de quitter la Terre.

Source :

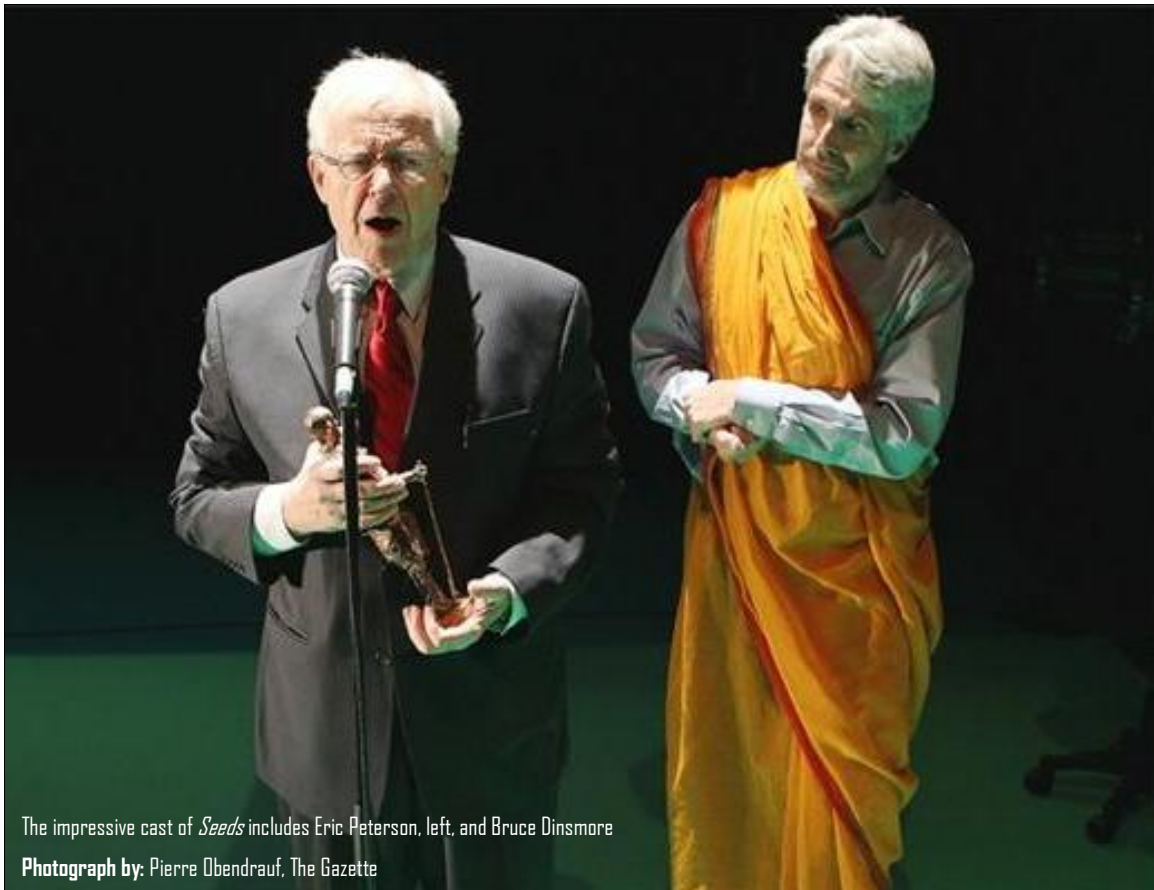
<http://www.lapresse.ca/arts/spectacles-et-theatre/theatre/201209/10/01-4572562-grains-champ-de-bataille.php>



# The Gazette

## Theatre review: Seeds

BY PAT DONNELLY, GAZETTE THEATRE CRITIC NOVEMBER 4, 2013



MONTREAL -- Why would a huge multinational company like Monsanto sue an ordinary Saskatchewan farmer for allowing certain innocent plants (not marijuana) to grow in his fields? And who was this wily farmer who fought back?

When Montreal playwright Annabel Soutar became interested in the Monsanto-vs.-Percy-Schmeiser patent infringement case, she pursued these questions as relentlessly as an investigative reporter. The result, after many years of digging, writing and refining, is a documentary drama titled *Seeds* that lays all the cards on the table and leaves it to the public to judge.

First staged in Montreal in 2005, when it was cited as Best English production of the year by the Association québécoise des critiques de théâtre (AQCT), *Seeds* has had a highly successful run in Toronto and is now playing at Centaur Theatre prior to a national tour.

**« Pourquoi une grande multinationale poursuivrait-elle un fermier ordinaire de Saskatchewan à cause de ce qu'il a planté dans ses champs? »**

A PLAY by  
Annabel Soutar

DIRECTED by  
Chris Abraham



# Organic genius



« *Multidimensionnel  
et fascinant* »

Photo : Maxime Côté

by [Anna Fuerstenberg](#)  
11.11.2013

Some people think that a docu-drama is like a documentary film, and in some ways that is so; both require an exhausting amount of research. However the live performance of SEEDS with its organic overlay of technology is a multi dimensional and fascinating evening of theatre that simply cannot be matched by anything two dimensional on this planet.

Starring the brilliant and very familiar Eric Peterson, as Percy Schmeiser, the man who stood up to Monsanto, It gives us the portrait of a complicated farmer who is as multifaceted as the story. liisa Repo-Martel plays Annabel ,the actual playwright of the story, a part that she inhabits with tremendous passion and sensitivity. Bruce Dinsmore, is rather terrific in his many incarnations and does a convincing symbolic and very presentational Dr. Vandana Shiva.

Mariah Inger is utterly convincing in her many roles, particularly as a Saskatchewan farmer. Cary Lawrence was a terrifying Monsanto spokesperson, and then amazing as a scientist, a farmer's wife and others. Tanya Jacobs is a fantastic Louise Schmeiser one minute and then comes on as a horrifying patent lawyer and judge the next.

Alex Ivanovici is totally compelling as the lawyer for Schmeiser and convincing as a farmer. But his moment of genius is to play himself, trying to get out of going for a yogurt for his pregnant playwright wife. This tiny domestic scene, where Annabel announces that she will have to leave home yet again because her research is not complete, captures the genius of the production. It is not just self critical and self reflective, at no time is the play didactic or overbearing. The scenes are brilliantly conveyed with the highest technology, and call upon the simplest of popular theatre methods to convey mood and time.

The nuanced tale is brilliantly lit by Ana Capelluto, and Chris Abrams has amply displayed why he was awarded the prestigious Siminovitch award.

This is an extraordinary work, brilliantly performed and magically conceived. IF you see nothing else this year, you will be able to say, I have seen a work of genius on stage in a Montreal theatre.

« *Si vous ne voyez rien d'autre cette année, vous pourrez dire que vous avez vu une œuvre géniale dans un théâtre de Montréal.* »

Source:  
<http://roverarts.com/2013/11/organic-genius/>

# Seeds of Prophecy: Annabel Soutar's *Seeds*

[Joel Fishbane](#)



From: [Canadian Theatre Review](#)  
[Volume 154, Spring 2013](#)

pp. 82-83 | 10.1353/ctr.2013.0026

« *Une pièce qui explore la croissance et la transformation* »

Liisa Repo-Martell (as the pregnant autobiographical playwright Annabel Soutar) and Alex Ivanovici in the 2012 production of Annabel Soutar's *Seeds*, directed by Chris Abraham.

Photo by Guntar Kravis

You've barely found your seat when a scientist asks you, "What is life?" Anywhere else you might ignore him, but this is the theatre, the place where weighty questions are meant to be asked. You realize you're being filmed: your face has been projected onto a screen that stretches across the back of the stage. What is life? All you can think is what US Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart once said about pornography.

"I know it when I see it," you reply.

The lights fade, and Annabel Soutar's docudrama *Seeds* begins. As the action plays out, you realize your clever answer will not quite suffice. Thanks to the introduction of genetic modification, we might not know life when we see it. Or, if you're a Saskatchewan farmer named Percy Schmeiser, when it blows onto your field.

With a script taken entirely from printed documents and interviews, *Seeds* is an exquisite reinvention of the verbatim theatre form. A David-and-Goliath story in which you're never quite sure who is who, the play is only ostensibly about the legal battle between Schmeiser, a canola farmer, and Monsanto Canada, an agricultural biotech firm that licenses crop-protection chemicals and seeds to farmers worldwide. In 1997, Schmeiser was sued for patent infringement after Monsanto claimed he had used their genetically modified seeds without a licence. But Soutar, a playwright who works exclusively in verbatim theatre, knew at once the story had deep implications about our relationship to life created in a laboratory (Soutar). Schmeiser claimed that the seeds blew onto his field without his knowledge, but the Supreme Court sided with Monsanto. The implications were staggering: if life itself can be patented, then ordinary citizens may be legally liable when life acts in unpredictable ways. The philosophical implications of this intrigued both Soutar and her director—Chris Abraham, the artistic director of Toronto's Crow's Theatre—leading them to create something more than a recitation of court transcripts and press clippings. Rather than simply report the facts, the pair shifted their attention to the larger impact of the story on the world around them. Through an array of innovative techniques, they explored the many ways the story affected its creators, changing *Seeds* into a play that, appropriately, explores the process of growth and transformation.

Source:

[http://muse.jhu.edu/login?auth=0&type=summary&url=/journals/canadian\\_theatre\\_review/v154/154.fishbane.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/login?auth=0&type=summary&url=/journals/canadian_theatre_review/v154/154.fishbane.html)

## Theatre Junction's 'Seeds' is a compelling docudrama

Jan. 17th 2013, by [JENNA SHUMMOOGUM](#)

« *Un docudrame envoûtant* »



The legal battles of biotech giant Monsanto and Saskatchewan farmer Percy Schmeiser is something that most people remember hearing about. Vaguely, at least. Playwright Annabel Soutar created a docudrama, comprising interviews with all of the pertinent players, including Schmeiser, Monsanto representatives, experts on genetically Modified foods, and farmers within the community. Add the deft direction of Chris Abraham and starring Eric Peterson, best known for his role in *Corner Gas*, along with a cast of amazing talent and you get Porte Parole's *Seeds* presented by Theatre Junction Grand.

The first thing you'll notice about the production is the use of multimedia. The play opens to members of the cast asking members of the audience various questions, such as: When have you felt apart from nature? a camera captures this and projects on a screen at the back of the stage. *Seeds* is full of multimedia, right down to the floor. Julie Fox's set design has the entire floor in green, which then turns into a green screen later on in the play. But at no point does Elysha Poirier's media design go over the top. It is well thought out and neatly rendered.

The play follows Sutar (played by Liisa Repo-Martell) as she conducts interviews and tries her best to show all sides of the story. She strives to show a balanced view, but as it also was illustrated in the media at the time, the case really was depicted as in the line of David vs Goliath. We all want to cheer for the little guy who in this case was getting sued for patent infringement. The play does veer into the bigger seed of the narrative, which is investigating and conducting interviews on whether GMO foods are actually safe. At the end of the story, you are left to make your own judgement on both the case and the bigger picture. Is Monsanto just trying to intimidate the smaller farmers with the threat of lawsuits? Do they really sue first and ask questions later? Or was Schmeiser trying to get a seed that was resistant to roundup without paying for it. These are all questions that the audience is left with.

What makes *Seeds* a poignant and compelling piece of theatre is how intricately all the elements fit together, coupled with the fact that the ensemble slips into each role seamlessly. It's a well researched, eye opening look into the industry of GMOs and at its heart is great storytelling.



Montreal-based theatre company [Porte Parole](#) self-identify as the place “where spectators become engaged citizens through the power of theatre.” After watching [Seeds](#), a documentary theatre piece written by Annabel Soutar and directed by Chris Abraham, I dare say this tagline stands firm.

As a dramatization of Soutar’s research into the [Monsanto Canada Inc. vs. Schmeiser case](#), the bulk of the production used court transcripts, recorded interviews, and public speeches, all performed verbatim by a chameleon cast of seven playing dozens. Only Saskatchewan farmer, Percy Schmeiser (Eric Peterson) remained the same throughout as his character represents the narrative arc while also serving as his own foil as our perspectives shift and slide over the course of this two hour production. Soutar’s character (played by Liisa Repo-Martell) also largely stays the same, in constant pregnancy as an extended metaphor, breaking only once to symbolically stand in as the Judge in the Supreme Court trial (there was no judge on stage for the lower court trial), which as an act of dramaturgy, was the only heavy-handed nod to the double-bind role of playwright and researcher.

Compressing five years of time involving a thorough explanation of biotechnology, law proceedings, and small town farming life into a seamless stream of vignettes and rapid-fire dialogue, the direction and staging of the play was remarkable in its flow. Using a three channel projection and a green screen on the floor to convey different settings as well as a live feed camera, the technology never overshadowed the performance of the cast, which sped and hummed across the stage together like a scroll unfurling.

While at times I questioned Soutar’s ethics that are neither journalistic or artistically sound in using material said off record or under the guise of remaining anonymous, she has written a play that calls into question the complexities of individual will in a globalized and multinational market place, starting with herself and her role in dramatizing and enterprising this story. Keeping a steady hand in balancing the story of her own experiences and letting the story breathe, the play works because the personal has been encouraged and allowed in as the main entry point into an otherwise clinical subject matter of patent rights and business ethics.

By now, it is no secret the Canadian Government has a complete lack of empathy towards ([or calculated rejection of](#)) science-based research, and continues to turn a blind eye over regulating the growth and labeling of [Genetically Modified Organisms/Food](#). Government is called to task, but the weight of the show is about the multiplicity of individual perspectives involved. Presenting voices from both sides of Schmeiser and Monsanto, *Seeds* does successfully complicate the media myth of David vs. Goliath. While sympathies were near impossible to form for the fast-talking suits and lab coats of Monsanto and hearts glowed afire for the humble passion of Schmeiser despite the mystery of his actions, the play ultimately leaves each spectator to form our own opinion, and perhaps partake in our own research and engaged citizenry based upon these facts sown.

[http://tumblr.co/Z\\_vxVw15AdQCW](http://tumblr.co/Z_vxVw15AdQCW)

[#Seeds](#) [#Porte Parole](#) [#Percy Schmesier](#) [#Monsanto](#) [#farming](#) [#biotechnology](#) [#GMO](#) [#Annabel Soutar](#) [#Chris Abraham](#) [#David](#) [#Goliath](#) [#science-based research](#) [#citizenry](#) [#public engagement](#) [#documentary theatre](#)



By Heidi J. Loos



Two men wearing white lab coats make their way into the audience. They have a few questions for tonight’s chosen ones. They jot down notes on their clipboards as they ask certain audience members questions like, what is life?

“In your own words, could you please define life?”

A woman in another long white coat films these impromptu interviews from the stage. The speaker’s faces are projected onto a large rectangular screen at the back of the theatre. Their voices, amplified by the microphone, crackle out of the overhead speakers. On the stage there are more researchers, doctors, and scientists in white coats. The stage is divided into part lab, part living room, part prairie farmhouse, and part courtroom. Somewhere out of sight a chicken is clucking.

This is how Chris Abraham’s staging of Annabel Soutar’s exhilarating docu-drama, SEEDS, begins.

We are told that the following piece of theatre has been made, pieced together from questions and answers, court transcripts, quotes, and interviews much like these ones.

SEEDS is the story of Percy Schmeiser (played by Canadian television star [Eric Peterson](#)) the Saskatchewan canola farmer who was sued for patent infringement in 1998 by the multi-billion dollar biochemical corporation, Monsanto. They accused Schmeiser of illegally obtaining and growing their genetically modified canola seed. The Monsanto seed, “Roundup Ready Canola” (which Schmeiser claimed must have blown onto his property or fallen out of a fellow farmer’s truck sometime in 1997), was a canola seed that had been genetically modified to be resistant to Monsanto’s own brand of herbicide “Round Up”.

« *On entend une poule caqueter quelque part. Ainsi débute un docudrame excitant.* »

# Theatre Review: Annabel Soutar's *Seeds* a brilliant docudrama

« *Un drame judiciaire scintillant* »

BY PATRICK LANGSTON, OTTAWA CITIZEN MARCH 29, 2014



Photo: Wayne Cunningham

Eric Peterson stars in the production *Seeds* which is running at the National Arts Centre until April 12.

Who would have guessed that a legal battle over genetically modified canola could be scintillating?

Yet that's precisely what Montreal playwright Annabel Soutar's docudrama *Seeds* achieves. Not to mention being a smart and sympathetic study of the complexities of human nature, a challenge to our tendency to operate on presuppositions, and a meditation on the nature of life.

The story seems straightforward. In the late 1990s, Saskatchewan farmer Percy Schmeiser (played here flawlessly by Eric Peterson of television's *Corner Gas* and *Street Legal*) was accused of patent infringement by agribusiness titan Monsanto Canada for planting their genetically modified (GM) canola seed without a licence.

Schmeiser claimed that the seeds had wound up on his property by accident, and that as a property owner he had the right to do with those seeds as he wished.

Monsanto figured he'd buckle under their pressure, but he fought back. The case wove its way to the Supreme Court of Canada where Schmeiser lost in a five to four decision in 2004.

Source: <http://www.ottawacitizen.com/technology/Theatre+Review+Annabel+Soutar+Seeds+brilliant+docudrama/9677244/story.html>

That several-years journey from farm field to the highest court in the land is Soutar's subject. She's used information from countless interviews and court transcripts to create a textured and demanding play that reflects the intricacies of what she encountered as she first researched in exhausting detail and then wrote about the battle.

Directed with a steady hand by Chris Abraham, the show shifts, courtesy of Julie Fox's clever set, from Schmeiser's kitchen to courtroom to a prairie restaurant to Monsanto corporate offices to Soutar's home where we see her struggling over her script.

There are videos including clips from Monsanto commercials with stirring orchestral scores and shots of sturdy, dedicated farmers.

There's a rapid-fire and entertaining explanation of how DNA works courtesy of Tanja Jacobs as a lab scientist (like all the actors except Peterson, she takes on multiple roles in the show).

There's a starry prairie night, startling in its calm and majesty.

And there is, trust me, much, much more.

Soutar has wisely injected herself into the show. Pregnant, blessed with the hound dog instincts of a good investigative journalist, and played with the right mix of objective curiosity and personal uncertainty by Christine Beaulieu, she's our guide through the labyrinth of scientific, legal and ethical detail.

Sometimes the playwright addresses us directly, sometimes she re-enacts scenes with the other characters she's interviewing, especially Schmeiser whose farm she visits. She thereby captures her own experience of being both inside and outside the story she's written.

We identify with Soutar as she struggles to digest the masses of information — much of it coloured by human emotion or larger agendas — thrown at her by the various players.

Like her, we are forced to confront our own assumptions (among them: David, aka prairie farmer, good; Goliath, profit-hungry corporation, bad).

And like Soutar, we discover that there are more mysteries here than our philosophy had anticipated, from how the GM canola actually wound up on Schmeiser's farm to speculation about a Monsanto plot to sneak their seed into Canadian life without our knowledge to the definition of life itself.

Lawyers (Alex Ivanovici is particularly good as Schmeiser's representative and in his other roles), scientists, a gas station attendant, Schmeiser's quirky wife Louise (Jacobs, in fine form): they help people the story swirling around Schmeiser who, we discover, is one savvy guy who knows what buttons to push in making his case.



## From these Seeds, a great polemic grows

Martin Morrow



Photo : Guntar Kravis

(...) Abraham navigates this ocean of material with a combination of theatrical and documentary-film techniques. The stage of the Young Centre's Michael Young Theatre has been opened up to accommodate a screen wide enough for a prairie vista. There are two onstage cameras for live video as well as images and titles designed by Elysha Poirier. On Julie Fox's cell-like set, the Schmeiser farmhouse is a cozy nucleus circled by sterile laboratories. The actors mime some scenes and use comic props in others. (...)

More subtle is the gender-blind casting, which doesn't call undue attention to itself. Mariah Inger is particularly effective as various gruff rural males. Peterson, meanwhile, is note-perfect as the folksy but keenly intelligent Schmeiser. His climactic Sierra Club speech on behalf of farmers is a thing of homespun eloquence, made the more stirring by Richard Feren's rousing score.

By then, however, Soutar has done such a good job sowing the seeds of doubt that you wonder if this is nothing more than passionate rhetoric. Her play gives us plenty to think about, but leaves us to make up our own minds.

Source: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/theatre-and-performance/from-these-seeds-a-great-polemic-grows/article548429/>



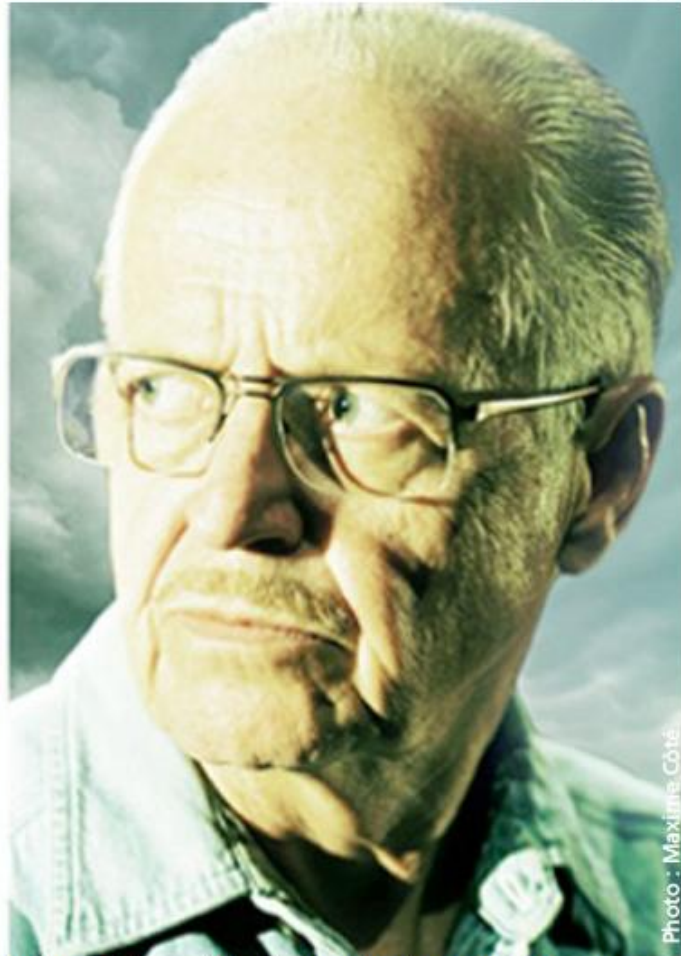
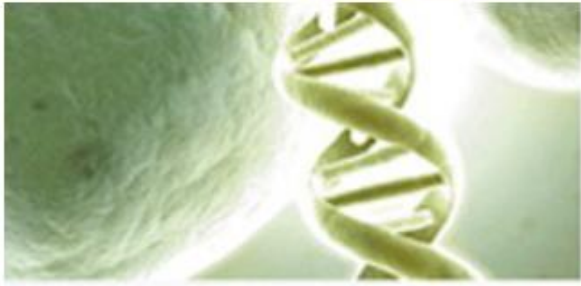


Photo : Maxime Côté

*Seeds is dramatic retelling of the court battle between Percy Schmeiser, a Saskatchewan farmer, and multinational pesticide and genetically modified seed manufacturer Monsanto.*

(...) Its author, Annabel Soutar, is herself one of the characters; the play is the narrative of her investigation, interview by interview. She was pregnant at the time, and this also feeds into the play, which periodically asks the question, what is life? It's suggestive, if not as strong a unifying theme as the author might wishfully have thought. As narrative, though, her script is both thoughtful and exciting; it makes the science fairly clear and the personal issues convincingly complex. The play has been masterfully staged by Chris Abraham. (The show is a co-production of Crow's Theatre, which Abraham directs, and Soutar's own Montreal company Porte Parole.) The design team has done superb work. Julie Fox designed the set, a deep wide space that looks initially like a lab but can take on any identity that's required. Richard Feren did the sound, Ana Capellutto the lighting and Elysha Poirier is responsible for the projections, which are exceptionally clear and helpful. (...)

Eric Peterson is dream casting for Schmeiser, cranky and scrappy. The guy's no innocent, as he keeps telling us he's an experienced politician, in fact an ex-mayor. He's a believer, who knows how to frame his beliefs to advantage. He can be grand and he can be petty – witness the way he turns on his chief defender at the end. Peterson's stumbles and hesitations when confronting the press or making a speech are dead on; it does seem to be the character who's stumbling rather than the actor, since in his domestic scenes he's perfectly fluent. (...)

The whole is one of the most impressive docu-dramas I've seen.



'Political' playwright says she has no agenda



Author Annabel Soutar says her theatre company tries "to bring people together into the same space from different linguistic, cultural, ideological and professional backgrounds."

MONTREAL - Theatre artists, even the ones with tape recorders, tend to use reality as a kickoff point to fantasy, rendering the concrete abstract. Playwright Annabel Soutar's work stands out within the docu-drama genre because she tries to look at a story from all angles and she checks her facts. Her drama is fact-driven, rather than the other way around.

When she hits the nail on the head, as she did with her *Sexy béton*, about the aftermath of the collapse of the de la Concorde Blvd. overpass in Laval, the impact is powerful. There's nothing abstract about concrete falling on your car.

The genetic modification of food is no fantasy, either. Some of the details of Soutar's play *Seeds*, which deals with the Monsanto Inc. vs. Percy Schmeiser case, do sound like science fiction, however. And the staging blends the realistic with the surreal.

(...)

Although people rightly see Soutar as a political playwright, "I'm political in a different sense," she said. "I don't have an agenda. I don't try to get people to conform to my point of view."

In *Seeds*, as in *Sexy béton*, it's left up to theatregoers to make up their own minds.

# SEEDS GRAIN(S)



Excerpts from Seeds: <https://vimeo.com/53108294>

Extraits de Grains : <https://vimeo.com/53152813>

Bande annonce : <https://vimeo.com/53083292>



Seeds' preview: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_iWGKXgINZs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_iWGKXgINZs)



Seeds et Grains, photos : <http://www.flickr.com/photos/porteparole/>  
Photographes : Maxime Côté, Guntar Kravis

Info, Grains : <http://porteparole.org/?affiche=seeds-grains>

Seeds' info: <http://porteparole.org/en/uncategorized/seedsontour/>



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