

# Portrayal of a teen on the edge brims with energy, razor wit at TUTA



Carolyn Molloy in TUTA Theatre Chicago's "The Edge of Our Bodies." - Original Credit: Handout (Anthony LaPenna / HANDOUT)

By **Kerry Reid**  
Chicago Tribune

MARCH 31, 2016, 9:58 AM

**W**hat if Holden Caulfield, the hero of J.D. Salinger's "The Catcher in the Rye," had been born female and a half-century later? Adam Rapp makes a compelling, if occasionally elliptical, argument that she'd be a lot like Bernadette, the protagonist in his almost-solo 2011 play, "The Edge of Our Bodies," now in a local premiere with TUTA Theatre Chicago.

Pregnant and 16, Bernadette begins the play on a train from her Vermont prep school to New York, where she plans to tell her boyfriend, Michael, about their shared predicament. But her journey takes several twists, from a wistful and haunting encounter with Michael's cancer-stricken father, Wayne, to a pickup in a bar with a lonely middle-aged man. (This incident in particular carries echoes of Holden's encounter with a prostitute.)

But Bernadette seems far less angry and angsty than Caulfield's teenage boy, which befits someone who already knows she wants to be a fiction writer. Bernadette is witty and self-deprecating, a bit self-conscious. She describes Marc, her bar pickup, as "barely handsome, the way certain Southern U.S. senators are barely alive."

She also relishes lying about herself to strangers, telling Marc her name is Diana and telling an old man on the train that her parents are a rocket scientist and a dwarf. At times one wonders how much Rapp is using Bernadette as a mouthpiece to demonstrate his own voracious literary appetite.

Yet Carolyn Molloy's performance as Bernadette and Jacqueline Stone's direction hone Rapp's story like a two-sided blade. One side makes cutting observations of how people fail each other, and the other slices through that scrim of despair to show the weak light of renewal through the act of telling stories. Martin Andrew's set includes an actual scrim through which we see much of the action in the 75-minute show — Molloy's kinetic Bernadette is very close but also at a remove.

Two things take us out of Bernadette's narrative. She recites dialogue from Jean Genet's play "The Maids," which makes some sense as she tells Wayne she is auditioning for the role of Claire, one of the murderous sisters-in-domestic-service in Genet's story. And then there is "the Man" (Sean Ewert), a janitor who pops up from time to time to clean the stage setting, also suggestive of "The Maids."

The idea seems to be that Bernadette is telling us her story within the frame of her school theater, dramatizing her recollections for an unseen audience. And that sort of works at evoking the out-of-body sense of dislocation that Bernadette and other people she meets during her night on the town keep talking about. But these interludes also distract us; it's like Rapp is saying, "Hey, don't get too attached to anything here, it's all just a show."

However, for the most part, "The Edge of Our Bodies" provides an arresting little picaresque about a smart young woman on the verge of adulthood, trying to figure out which story will define her future. Molloy's performance — vibrant, funny and a little dangerous — makes it well worth going out on the edge with Bernadette.

*Kerry Reid is a freelance critic.*

### 3 STARS

**When:** Through May 22

**Where:** TUTA Theatre Chicago, 4670 N. Manor Ave.

**Tickets:** \$25-\$30 at [www.tutato.com](http://www.tutato.com)

Copyright © 2017, Chicago Tribune

A version of this article appeared in print on April 01, 2016, in the On the Town section of the Chicago Tribune with the headline "Energy, razor wit hone tale of teen on edge" — [Today's paper](#) | [Subscribe](#)

**This article is related to:** [Reviews](#), [Theater](#)