

# My Cultural Landscape

(Copyright George Heymont, All Rights Reserved)

## "A" As In Apple

Sunday, April 3, 2011



Not only does [Legacy of Light](#) start with a giant image of an apple floating in front of a cloudy sky, apples are all over the stage in Act II. The critical role played by an apple in inspiring Sir Isaac Newton takes center stage -- as does the popular adage that "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree."

The [San Jose Repertory](#) is currently producing the West Coast premiere of this charming [dramedy](#) by [Karen Zacarias](#) in a production designed by [William Bloodgood](#) with costumes by [Brandin Baron](#). Zacarias got her inspiration for the play when she stumbled across a footnote referring to [Emilie du Chatelet](#), whom [Voltaire](#) once described as follows: "For a long time she moved in circles which did not know her worth and she paid no attention to such ignorance. I saw her, one day, divide a nine-figure number by nine other figures, in her head, without any help, in the presence of a mathematician unable to keep up with her."

As the action in *Legacy of Light* bounces back and forth between France in the 1700s and modern [New Jersey](#), the audience gets to know the following cast of characters:

- Emilie du Chatelet ([Rachel Harker](#)), the talented French author, [mathematician](#), and [physicist](#) who achieved posthumous fame for her translation of Sir Isaac Newton's [Principia Mathematica](#).
- Monsieur du Chatelet ([Mike Ryan](#)), Emilie's most accommodating husband.
- Pauline ([Kathryn Tekl](#)), Emilie's daughter who is forced into an arranged marriage.
- Saint-Lambert ([Miles Gaston Villaneuva](#)), Emilie's handsome young lover.
- Voltaire ([Robert Yacko](#)), the famous writer ([Candide](#)), [philosopher](#), and historian whose character, Pangloss, insisted that "all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds." One of Emilie's former lovers, Voltaire is extremely protective of her daughter, Pauline.
- Olivia (Carrie Paff), a modern day [astrophysicist](#) and survivor of [uterine cancer](#) who may have discovered a [planet](#) being born.
- Peter (Mike Ryan), Olivia's devoted husband, who loves his work as an elementary school teacher.
- Millie (Kathryn Tekl), the young woman who has offered to become a [surrogate mother](#) for Olivia and Peter.
- Lewis (Miles Gaston Villaneuva), Millie's stuffy, self-righteous brother.



Emilie du Chatelet (Rachel Harker) entertains her young lover, Saint-Lambert (Miles Gaston Villaneuva) in San Jose Rep's production of *Legacy of Light* (Photo by: Kevin Berne)

*Legacy of Light* (which had its world premiere at the [Arena Stage in Washington, D.C.](#) in 2009) received the [American Theatre Critics Association's](#) Best New Play Award for 2010. Not only does Zacarias do a stellar job of showcasing the personal and professional challenges faced by intelligent women more than 250 years apart, her use of [magical realism](#) imbues the play's second act with extraordinary appeal.

As directed by [Kirsten Brandt](#), San Jose Rep's six-member ensemble did an impressive job bringing *Legacy of Light* to life. I was especially impressed with Rachel Harker's portrait of Emilie du Chatelet and Kathryn Tekl's work doing double duty as Millie and Pauline. Carrie Paff's Olivia offered a compelling portrait of a female astrophysicist who goes into a panic when her surrogate mother starts having labor pains.



Olivia (Carrie Paff) is an astrophysicist who may have discovered a planet being born in the San Jose Rep's production of *Legacy of Light* (Photo by: Kevin Berne)

Robert Yacko's Voltaire was highly entertaining while Mike Ryan worked the comedy and pathos sides of Monsieur du Chatelet and Peter quite nicely. The dashing handsome Miles Gaston Villanueva scored strongly in the dual roles of Saint-Lambert and Lewis.

*Legacy of Light* continues at San Jose Rep through April 17 (you can [order tickets here](#)). This is a well-directed and smartly-written play about women of great intellectual strength coping with difficult physical challenges while trying not to lose focus on their life's work.