

Summer 2014

Review: The Journal of Dramaturgy, volume 23, issue 2

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Review

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PHOTO: CYNTHIA SORELE



PHOTO: AMANDA RUSSELL



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LITERARY MANAGERS
& DRAMATURGS
OF THE AMERICAS

EDITOR'S NOTE

The current issue of *Review* addresses the past, present, and future of dramaturgy. We hear from veteran theatre artists, early career dramaturgs, and scholars who are using the technology of today to make the theatre of the past more accessible.

At the annual conference of the LMDA in Vancouver, B.C., we had the honor of hearing from five esteemed colleagues as part of a keynote event titled "Speaking of Change." Among them were Carmen Aguirre, Norman Armour, Tara Beagan, Liz Engleman, and Rebecca Novick. Reprinted here is Carmen Aguirre's speech, "Re-defining Risk," in which she considers what an underground political performance in Lima, Peru, taught her about taking emotional risks as a theatre artist.

Last summer, the Elliott Hayes Award for Outstanding Achievement in Dramaturgy was awarded to Jimmy Noriega for his inspiring work developing *Mother of Exiles*, which addresses the experiences of Latina/os navigating life on the U.S.-Mexico border. We include here the text of Stephen Colella's introduction to the project and Noriega's own description of the "dangerous dramaturgy" he and his collaborators undertook in an effort to bring the stories of an underrepresented population to the North American stage.

A highlight of any LMDA conference is the energy and passion our Early Career Dramaturgs bring to the conversation. Liz Engleman moderated a discussion with a group of three ECDs who had written manifestoes about the future of dramaturgy. Included here is one of those manifestoes along with a manifesto generated during the discussion by panelists Brandon Hackett, Alexandra Hamill, and Jessica Ordon in collaboration with audience members.

Review

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In "Juan Radrigán and the Gringo," ECD Curtis Russell reflects on his three-month research trip to Chile with his seven-year-old son, and reminds us "attention must be paid" to the theatre of our South American neighbors.

Laurel Green interviews Nightswimming's Brian Quirt about his recent collaboration with Anita Majumdar, *Same Same but Different*, a performance comprised of two intersecting one-act plays that draw on Bollywood cinema's use of music and dance to tell a story.

In "National Theatre," Gavin Witt describes the inception and execution of Center Stage's ambitious *My America* project, which solicited from over 50 established and emerging playwrights monologues that responded to the question "What, or where, is your America?" The resulting pieces were filmed by award-winning director Hal Hartley and can be viewed online at <http://myamerica.centerstage.org/>.

Finally, Wendy Arons, Natalya Baldyga, and Michael Chemers describe one of the most historically significant undertakings in 21st century dramaturgy scholarship: "Crowdsourcing a New *Hamburg Dramaturgy*." Arons and co-translator Sara Figal are undertaking for the first time a complete English translation of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Hamburg Dramaturgy*. (The only previous English translation of these writings omitted most of Lessing's discussion of specific performances.) But they are not translating in isolation; rather they are publishing their translation-in-progress to a website that allows and, in fact, encourages a dialogic encounter with the process of translation itself.

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Inquiries from prospective contributors are welcome. All inquiries should be directed to Sydney Cheek-O'Donnell: editor@lmda.org. Review Volume 23 number 2, Summer 2014.

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LMDA CONFERENCE 2013

Re-defining Risk, A Keynote Address

By Carmen Aguirre

When I was eighteen years old I had the most searing theatrical experience of my life. It happened in Lima, Peru, during the civil war there. It was May 1986, and I had just joined the Chilean resistance that was fighting Pinochet's right-wing dictatorship.

Now if you joined the underground outside of Chile, like I did, you did so in Lima, where you would get your orders. But first you had to take the oath.

The oath said that I would give my life to the resistance, that I agreed to be executed by the resistance if I broke under torture and gave my comrades away, and that I would always follow orders no matter what. Security was of the utmost importance; people fell all the time: Pinochet's dictatorship was considered one of the most "secure" in the world (in other words, the secret police were everywhere), and the Peruvian secret police worked with Pinochet as well. So one must never ever do anything stupid.

Stupid things included, but were not limited to, going to the theatre. It was okay to go to a mainstream performance of, say, *Mary Poppins*, because the probability of the secret police going to *Mary Poppins* to look for dissidents was quite low. But to attend a performance that could have been considered in any way alternative was absolutely, strictly prohibited. The cops, the military, the secret police, were more likely to show up at an alternative performance and sniff around for possible subversives. And if you happened to be there, and if they happened to discover who you were, you'd be dead if you were lucky. Most likely you'd be tortured to the point of no return.

The day after I took the oath, while I was walking around downtown Lima sobbing uncontrollably under my mirrored sunglasses due to being gripped by a state of chronic grief and terror, my first husband, who had also joined the resistance, pointed out a scribbled sign on a telephone pole. In between my heaving and sobbing I managed to read

CARMEN AGUIRRE is a Vancouver-based theatre artist who has written and co-written twenty plays, including *Chile Con Carne*, *The Trigger*, *The Refugee Hotel*, and *Blue Box*. Her plays have been nominated for a Dora Mavor Moore Award (Toronto), four Jessie Richardson Theatre Awards (Vancouver), and The Siminovitch Prize (national). Her first book, *Something Fierce: Memoirs of a Revolutionary Daughter* won CBC Canada Reads 2012 and is a #1 national bestseller. Carmen has over sixty film, television and stage acting credits, and has been nominated for a Calgary Theatre Critics' Award for her performance in *The Motherfucker With The Hat*. She is the recipient of the 2002 New Play Centre's Best New Play Award, the 2011 Union of B.C. Performers' Lorena Gale Woman of Distinction Award, and Langara College's 2012 Outstanding Alumna Award. Carmen is a graduate of the prestigious theatre training program Studio 58.

the haphazard sign. It was advertising a play. The play was to start after curfew, which was in and of itself illegal, and hence beyond “alternative,” and the pencilled note said, “Come if you dare.”

So, being young and stupid, my first husband and I broke all the rules of the oath we’d taken a mere 24 hours earlier, and we dared to go to the play.

We arrived just before curfew at the allotted location. There were a couple of dozen other people there, of all ages and mixed social classes. We all nodded at each other and then stared at the ground as Lima prepared for curfew: last stragglers running home, packed buses speeding down the street, the first military helicopters. I sobbed quietly, the terror never subsiding, until a First Nations man in bare feet and white pants came out and gestured to enter the building, which looked like a school of sorts. We followed him in single file, with a mix of excitement and doom, because no one knew whether this was some kind of set-up and we were all heading to our tragic, basically self-inflicted deaths, or whether it really was a play.

We were taken to a classroom, where the chairs had been arranged in a circle. We all sat down and the man disappeared. As time passed, the sounds of curfew became more prominent. Now, curfew is mostly just silence, except for the intermittent sounds of helicopters, military vehicles, a bomb exploding here and there, and the odd shot ringing through the night. These sounds became our walk-in music, as it were. We all grew even more terrified (that was obvious), chiding ourselves that we’d all been stupid enough to take on the dare. I wondered if there were secret police members in the audience. A fresh stream of tears gushed from my eyes. Mercilessly. Unrevolutionarily.

All of a sudden a guitar played and a man came in, a troubadour of sorts, also in bare feet and white pants. He sang a beautiful song with no lyrics, just haunting sounds. He was followed by a woman (bare feet, white attire) and two other men, dressed the same, the last one being the man who’d let us in.

For the next two non-stop hours these four performers told us the history of Peru from the time of the Spanish Conquest until that very moment in time: May 1986, the civil war. They told the story with their bodies. No text was spoken. Sounds emitted from their mouths, but not a single word. They created image upon image upon image and a soundscape with their voices and breath periodically punctuated by the sounds of curfew. The images were of genocide, rape, slavery, starvation, and, ultimately, resistance: a celebration of life; the history of that country from the point of view of the oppressed-slash-freedom fighters.

They finished their play by dancing a *cumbia* as they sang the only text: “We may be fucked, but we’re fucking happy.” More tears flowed. For the rest of the night, we all stayed in that classroom, chatting, sleeping, laughing, until curfew was lifted at six in the morning.



PHOTO: PAUL DZENKOW

Carmen Aguirre

That play, and the circumstances in which I saw it, is seared in my brain to this day. In that moment, in which for all intents and purposes I was having a nervous breakdown, I was willing to break all the rules and risk it all to have a story told to me. And it paid off: the play gave me the inspiration to continue, contextualized once more why I had chosen to join a movement that sought to liberate my continent from the very oppression depicted in the play, and it gave me joy in a time of great terror. It expanded my tiny universe of paranoia and let in the light. Basically, it took me out of myself and reminded me to not take myself so seriously, that, ultimately, the story was much larger than my own personal narrative, that I had put myself in a terrifying situation, that I had risked it all, in order to serve a larger story in which I was a mere player. And that that was worth doing.

By the time I came back to Canada to go to theatre school in order to learn the skills to tell the stories of my community, the Latino community in exile, stories that are rarely if ever seen on Canadian stages, I thought I knew everything there was to know about risk and terror and failure, because the revolution we had been fighting for had been lost.

Innocently, arrogantly, I thought that I would not have to experience risk, terror, and failure again. Because I thought that the artistry behind good storytelling was about pretending convincingly. I had yet to learn that a well-told story is most effective when there is no pretension at all, that a story moves us to the core when the storyteller un.masks herself and seeks the truth in every moment, and that truth-seeking is by its very nature risk-taking, and that risk-taking often leads to failure, and that all of this can be terrifying.

And so when I remembered those Lima curfew-players, it dawned on me that the risk they took was two-fold: yes, they were taking a political risk by performing their play after curfew to an audience that may have included the enemy, but they were also taking an emotional risk by opening their hearts to a bunch of strangers that may have included the enemy. This dual responsibility was so great that letting us down was not an option. They contextualized their story personally, socially, politically, and historically, and thus reminded us that we mattered, that our communities mattered. And in sharing a piece of art that was engaging in content and form, they made themselves vulnerable emotionally and artistically. There was no pretending. They told their truth, they risked failure. As the military seized the night, they risked it all by being present in every moment, by opening their hearts and minds. And that is why we transformed from a paranoid audience of individual stories into a courageous community with a larger story in common.

I had risked it all to hear a story, and the reason the risk paid off was because those highly-skilled storytellers were able to articulate my own defining story, conjuring meaning out of raw experience. They took us into the dark and transcended the pain, they created symbols that the entire room owned, reminding us that our stories matter. They let us

know they were committed in every sense of the word to social and artistic transformation.

That was a key point in my learning: the re-definition of risk. And so now, whenever I tell a story, if I'm not afraid on some level, I know I must be doing something wrong. I learned to risk vulnerability after developing a hard, necessary shell under Pinochet's Chile. I learned that the terror of risking vulnerability in front of strangers in order to seek the truth in every moment was equal to the terror I felt in the resistance. I learned that many times, when we are telling a story on the stage, we fail. We get it wrong. I learned that the definition of a successful artist is simply someone who insists on doing their work, in spite of, or because of, the risk, the terror, the failure: the public humiliation.

Pablo Milanes, the internationally renowned Cuban singer-songwriter, has said that he pities the artist who does not risk himself or his art. When I started to learn the art of storytelling, I was able to see exactly what he meant: those curfew players put themselves on the line in every sense of the word. I strive to do the same, and, to this day, nothing moves me more than a piece of art that risks it all.

2013 LMDA CONFERENCE

ELLIOTT HAYES AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT IN DRAMATURGY

Introduction

by Stephen Colella

The LMDA grants and awards committee sits down every April with a formidable task—to look at some of the most innovative, committed, smart and significant projects that have happened in the U.S. and Canada over the past two years and select one—just one—to receive the Elliott Hayes Award for Outstanding Achievement in Dramaturgy. And because the field this year was so exceptional, the committee, consisting of Martin Kinch, Martha Wade Steketee and Vessela Warner, asked me more than once, “Can’t we just give it to two people?”

Fortunately for me, they realized we ultimately could not, which is good because I had no desire to write two introductory speeches. Nor, I imagine, would you want to listen to them. In the process of deliberations, some of the things they said about the eventual recipient were:

- That the recipient had taken the lead on an extensive and complicated project:
 - by helping to define the piece
 - by giving careful consideration in negotiating relationships with both collaborators and cross-cultural exchange
 - by making smart decisions in bringing the contextualization of different cultures to the collaborators
 - by being a strong advocate for the playwright

The committee also said:

- That the dramaturgical and sociological engagement of the project was skillfully facilitated through an ability to shape the process and a commitment to making the process work for the collaborators
- That the dramaturg was grounded in his culture and was able to handle ethical situations with great skill and diplomacy
- And the final comment from one of the committee members that seemed to echo in everyone’s ears was that this endeavor was the work of the lone passionate dramaturg.

Though the recipient certainly wasn’t alone in this process, he was singular in his commitment. In the words of the playwright, “I signed my commission contract at the end of January and handed the play in on February 15th. I was able to do so because I had the right advocate who listened to me, took time, and knew me and my work well enough to fight for what was right.”

For those of you doing the math, that is about two weeks in which to write a play. But the genesis of this project happened a year earlier, long before the playwright was even involved. The project began when a director and theatre professor from Cornell approached the recipient to work with her to adapt the French film *Skirt Day*, based in a Turkish immigrant neighbourhood in Berlin. The director wanted to create an adaptation of this film that would examine the perspective of the Latina/Latino population in the United States. The project was intriguing and challenging—it would be intriguing because it necessitated new ways of working—to work on a play about Latina/o culture with a non-Latina director (who also wanted to write the play), to cross-culturally collaborate, to give voices to the underrepresented and to engage with controversial political issues (i.e., gun control and immigration). It would be challenging because the social, political and cultural context of the source material that was being proposed did not seem to translate to Latina/os in the United States. Additionally, a co-dramaturg, who was Turkish and German, was also already involved in order to facilitate a cultural exchange between the Latina/Latino culture of the new production and the Turkish culture of the source material. Regardless of the challenge, our dramaturg accepted.

In the next few months, the recipient was able to gently but firmly convince the director that it would be problematic for her to both write and direct a play about the Latina/o population as a non-Latina and that another creative mind would be highly beneficial to the process. Elaine Romero, a famed and prolific Latina playwright who had spent most of her adult life on the Arizona/Mex-

ico border, was recommended by this dramaturg as the writer for the project. The dramaturg was then able to go a step further and helped convince Cornell University to support her work on the project. Elaine was brought under commission, which made her the first Latina to be commissioned by Cornell and made the play, *Mother of Exiles*, the first one by a U.S. Latina to be presented on the mainstage of Cornell University Lecture series.

Now, with a director in New York, a playwright in Chicago and a co-dramaturg in Berlin and our protagonist in Ohio, a plan was set in motion to try and bring everyone together to contextualize the world of the play. While the playwright was unfortunately unavailable, the dramaturgs and director were able to gather together to travel to Arizona and Mexico. Our recipient felt it was necessary to travel further, to also meet the children of immigrants in schools further from the border in Monett, Missouri. In their 9 days of travel to Tucson, Tombstone and Douglas in Arizona, Agua Prieta in Mexico and Monett in Missouri, the collaborators had the opportunity to meet teachers and principals in schools along the border—to learn about security measures, safety plans and how they handled prejudice in the classroom. The collaborators were able to observe classes, as well as visit shantytowns, historic sites and government buildings. They crossed the U.S./Mexican border on foot and by vehicle. They interviewed students, both Anglo and Mexican, about their experiences with racism, education and violence. All of these experiences, which were crucial to the creation of the play, were decided upon and arranged by the recipient of our award tonight.

Next our intrepid band traveled to Berlin to tour Turkish-German neighbourhoods and meet with an immigrant theatre. However, at this time, the co-dramaturg withdrew from the project. But our now lone dramaturg was able to re-frame the departure into a “good problem”—they were free to grow away from the original source material and draw on their research, discussions and interviews in Arizona, Mexico and Missouri.

Delivered this newfound freedom, the playwright was able to deliver a draft a short time later. The new play work—cuts, edits, additions, tying the story and character development to the research—continued, as did the production dramaturgy for the cast, most of whom had never lived near the border, and the other related tasks such as the lobby display and post-performance chats for an audience with very little exposure to the stories that accompany the issue of immigration. The aim of this work was to put a human face to the story of immigration at a time when the national discourse in the United States is frequently aimed at dehumanizing the immigrant. All of this work was spearheaded by our recipient tonight.

From the very beginning to the very end of this project, there was smart and wise facilitation and negotiation that allowed this project to flourish. This dramaturg was an advocate for the playwright, a guide and source of information for a director, a conduit to the people who this story represents and an avenue of access for an audience that might otherwise never know this tale. For the distinctiveness of his approach, his ability to contextualize the story for his collaborators, the tact and ethics with which he managed this project and the impact he had in so many different ways on this play, I am pleased to present this year’s Elliott Hayes Award for Outstanding Achievement in Dramaturgy to Jimmy Noriega.

2013 LMDA CONFERENCE

ELLIOTT HAYES AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT IN DRAMATURGY

Staging Latina/o Classrooms and Culture: DNA and Dangerous Dramaturgy at the U.S.-Mexico Border

By Jimmy A. Noriega

JIMMY A. NORIEGA is Assistant Professor in the Department of Theatre and Dance at The College of Wooster. In addition to his work as a dramaturg and translator, he has directed over 30 productions in English and Spanish, including invited performances at theatres and festivals in Mexico, Ecuador, Peru, Israel, Romania, Canada, and New York City. His research and teaching areas are Latina/o and Latin American Theatre and Performance; Theatre as Social Change; Directing; Dramaturgy; and Acting. He serves as Conference Planner for the Latina/o Focus Group of the Association for Theatre in Higher Education and is on the Executive Committee of the American Society for Theatre Research. He is the recipient of the 2013-2014 ATHE/KCACTF Prize for Innovative Teaching and holds a PhD from Cornell University.

I want to thank the LMDA for this very special recognition. I am so honored to receive this award from such an important and vital organization—one that advances the limits of our profession and advocates for the power of the creative voice. The conversations I've heard and been a part of during the past few days have inspired me and pushed me into new ways of thinking about my own work as a dramaturg, artist, teacher, and scholar. I look forward to our future conversations.

Working with Elaine Romero on the development of *Mother of Exiles* is one of the best collaborative relationships that I have ever experienced in the theatre. I want to thank Elaine for being one of the most giving, generous, kind, and compassionate people I know. The two of us worked together for extended periods of time, eagerly working to represent our community in a truthful and positive way. Our work as Latina/o theatre artists is a special one and we never lost sight of this. Over the course of several months—through email, over the phone, and in the rehearsal space—we found new ways to give voice and recognition to those issues and perspectives that do not often get an opportunity to take center stage on our North American theatre spaces. For that I also want to thank all of the faculty, staff, and students at Cornell University who helped make this amazing play possible. I want to urge them to keep seeking out ways to generate new works and to create spaces for those who have historically been kept from the stage. I hope others will do the same.

I passionately believe that theatre can create change. I didn't know this when I first became involved in the theatre, but I am grateful that I now know better. Many of you have been creating this change for years and I look at all of you as inspiration and hope for a brighter future. It is our task to teach this important lesson to others. But *Mother of Exiles* also made me realize the ways the theatre changed my own life. I returned to my hometown—Douglas, Arizona—to work on this play. My work in Arizona and Mexico brought back some forgotten memories of life growing up along the border in the 1980s and 1990s. In many ways, my work on this production was

a dramaturgy of DNA. I was researching, learning, and teaching my own culture and hometown as a way of creating theatre. I was using my own life as an entry into the difficult issues Elaine was going to write about and develop in her play. In returning to the Arizona-Mexico border, I knew I was a different person, but I also knew that I was coming back to the place that first instilled within me a love of the theatre. I could see how this early passion for art changed my life—if it were not for theatre, I would have never left Douglas. And though I hesitate to speak poorly of my hometown, my return reminded me, sadly, that not much had changed since my departure (and visits over the years). I now returned as a dramaturg and brought with me a team of people whose goal was to dream up a show that would speak to life on the border and I knew that there was great responsibility in how it should be done. This was my chance to give back to Douglas and all the people who supported me throughout the years. We met with students and teachers, U.S. citizens and Mexican citizens, happy and angry people, and those who navigated the tensions of their lives with both confusion and hope. We listened. We learned. We shared our passions and asked others about their own dreams and desires.

But not all of our work was as great as I am making it sound now. Part of the work on this play became what I call “dangerous dramaturgy.” We were working in a zone where violence is a real and constant force. These risks were not foreign to me, but since I was charged with leading a creative team through this dangerous territory, I was burdened by an awareness that I was often more responsible for safety than education. We traveled in cars driven by trusted friends who spoke of their own anxieties and fears as we crossed into areas considered highly dangerous. We were warned about crossing the border after certain hours and were sometimes followed by people as we made our way through the streets by foot. We were mortified to see the faces of young boys and girls on missing posters and flyers plastered across walls and on telephone poles. Though we took an overly cautious approach to Mexico, what struck me most was that the worst danger posed to me was by U.S. authorities: I was yelled at and harassed by a customs agent as we walked across the border back into the U.S. After asking me where I was born—my response was “Douglas”—he did not believe that I was a college professor. I was detained, questioned, yelled at, and then allowed to leave because I did not pose any risk or threat. I guess he underestimated the power of the theatre!

The individuals that we worked with during our research trips were enthusiastic and eager about our project. They were surprised to hear that we—artists—wanted to learn about and creatively represent their lives on the border. The people we spoke to are living in a zone where politics, history, and democracy intersect in violent ways, and often at the expense of those who are most vulnerable. Even in Missouri, where we interviewed Latina/os and non-Latina/os about issues of immigration, we found common themes that tie the border region to the middle of the U.S. People carry the border within them, and whether or not they try to escape its grip, divisive politics and racism are products of fear and a culture that seeks hatred and division as defenses against the unknown. As the Latina/o population continues to grow and as we welcome people from Latin America into the U.S. and Canada, we as artists have an obligation to create works that speak to the new audiences taking shape across our countries. The Latina/o community is eager for



PHOTO: CYNTHIA SORELLE

Jimmy Noriega, holding the 2013 Elliott Hayes Award.

a new theatre that will speak to its people, culture, and love of art. We are in the position to create works that bridge communities and speak to multiple audiences. We can push the limits of our art by challenging ourselves to embrace our new community members.

As a Latino theatre artist, I recognize and advocate for the power of the theatre and the importance of telling those unheard stories on the stage, but I also understand that any public display or performance about undocumented immigration carries with it a great risk and responsibility. As a dramaturg in this process, I continuously reminded myself that the physical body is at the center of this immigration crisis and that theatre and performance can offer a useful model from which to critique and explore the different reactions to political issues that sometimes seem foreign or unrecognizable. Our theatre can push us to ask difficult questions, find similarities, and accept and embrace differences.

Over the past few days we have heard a lot of talk about borders: what they mean to us, how they shape and divide us, and how we can work with and against them. The keynotes offered by our First Nations colleagues struck a deep chord within me. Many of our communities have been torn apart and scarred by the forced imposition of borders and violent mappings of our lands. Across the Americas cultures and people share these pains and histories. But our conference has also allowed us to see the ways that the theatre can help us to understand, heal, and cross those borders. The LMDA, as an international organization, shows us that border crossing in the name of art is not just possible, but can also have the most amazing results. I am standing here as a visitor in Vancouver, Canada—at another border much different than the one where I grew up—sharing this open space with all of you. And that, to me, is amazing! We have all come to be a part of this moment and space because of our shared love for dramaturgy, storytelling, collaboration, and theatre. I have met many of you who work with underrepresented individuals to build community, tell stories, and create social justice through the theatre. Be it Latina/o, First Nations, queer, differently abled, or any other type of story we can help tell—I urge you to keep listening and to keep sharing. Thank you so much.

2013 LMDA CONFERENCE

Early Career Dramaturgs Envision the Future of Dramaturgy: An Ensemble-Created Manifesto

The Early Career Dramaturgs Imagine the Future panel in Vancouver, B.C., was inspired by conversations at a Northwest LMDA regional event. The panelists discussed their ideas about the future of dramaturgy through the presentation of personal manifestos and then invited the audience to create a manifesto with them. The panel included Alexandra Hamill, Brandon Hackett, and Jessica Ordon, and was moderated by Liz Engleman.

We want a dramaturgy that ...

- Is post-textual
- Is a friendship of problems (and offers a promise of happiness)
- Is ongoing
- Is adaptable, that is confident
- Is not waiting to ask permission
- Doesn't have to prove its necessity
- Knows and articulates its necessity
- Creates
- Does not untangle knots
- Is playful
- Is not afraid of the cracks between
- Embraces expertise and also knows when to reject it
- Is political
- Goes into communities (the work is for someone)
- Invites community
- Creates holistic voice
- Focuses voices of communities
- Embraces messiness
- Breaks through barriers
- That leads aggressively
- Is in basements and bars
- Is without shoes
- Is online, interactive, and focused
- Is crowdsourced
- Is performative, communal
- Creates dialogue
- Has a sense of humor
- Moves into new/different disciplines
- Is not timid

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What Is the Future of Dramaturgy? A Manifesto

by **Alexandra Hamill**

My mentor John Kendall Wilson uses a description of dramaturgy that I was recently reminded of by a director I'll be working with at Cornish College of the Arts next season: "We don't just want the dramaturg to go to the well of knowledge and wisdom and bring us back the water; we want her to go to the well of knowledge and wisdom and drink and come back to tell us what the water tastes like." I think that this is a good seed for dramaturgy, and I keep thinking about how to expand upon it and exceed it.

Now, as a discipline dramaturgy is meant to support other art forms which it serves, so the evolution of the future of dramaturgy is directly related to the needs of those art forms we serve, whether they be theatre, dance, performance art, etc. This doesn't necessarily have to mean that we are passive when considering dramaturgy's future. In fact, I believe that we shouldn't be.

I want a dramaturgy that speaks clearly and sweetly with a big stick, a dramaturgy that has confidence in its stewardship of the theater, but will not bend so much as to serve under unfair conditions.

I want a dramaturgy that learns from the mistakes of the western education system and finds more tactics besides words on paper to educate performers and directors. More communal research, experiential research, performative research, and imaginative research is needed. Even if some of these (and I'd say because some of these) are subjective and treacherous ground to explore dramaturgically. All the better if we develop the tools to use these methods.

I want a dramaturgy that demolishes the separation that has been set up between us (the artists) and them (the audience and communities we serve).

I want a dramaturgy that is not afraid to get messy. In some ways I sense that dramaturgs fear getting tangled up in the cracks between the personal and the academic, the subjective and the objective, and any other position that blurs boundaries, whether it be our own boundaries or someone else's. We should engage these tough spaces, tangled as they are and appreciate them for that messiness. The goal is not to

untangle them, but to see what can be found in that web. These webs are places where dramaturgy can thrive due to the amount of creative energy, thought, and questions around these points of contention.

I want a dramaturgy that is fearless in engaging with the world beyond the theatre. I want dramaturgy that doubles as activism and goes hand in hand with participating actively in a nation and encourages others to do so as well.

I want a dramaturgy that helps to do away with "the play you go see once and never do anything with again in your life." Dramaturgy should be at the forefront of fostering ongoing performances, projects, and dialogues with the community that serve the community as a whole. I am already in preproduction work at Cornish's for *Ajax in Iraq* by Ellen McLaughlin. Marya Sea Kaminski, our director, turned to me and said, "I always talk a great game when I start productions about really engaging with the people whose stories we're telling, and then I get into rehearsals, and suddenly the run is here, and I've done maybe half of what I said I'd do." This seems to be a common theme in the theater, and dramaturgs have every ability to help alleviate that issue.

"We don't just want the dramaturg to go to the well of knowledge and wisdom and bring us back the water; we want her to go to the well of knowledge and wisdom and drink and come back to tell us what the water tastes like." And then once we know what the water tastes like, we can dig into the creative aquifers at our feet, build a well shared by artists and the community, and drink, time and time again, together as citizens.

Alexandra Hamill is a recent graduate of Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle, WA. She has served Velocity Dance Center as their first Dramaturgical Intern and Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA/USA) as a conference planning intern. Alexandra will present her work on Cornish's 2013 production of *Ajax In Iraq* by Ellen McLaughlin as part of ATHE's Dramaturgy Debut Panel in July, 2014.

Juan Radrigán and the Gringo, or Why Chilean Theatre Deserves our Attention

By Curtis Russell

Curtis Russell recently received his BA in Theatre Studies from the University of Utah. He was Pioneer Theatre Company's dramaturgical assistant for the 2012-13 season, and assistant director for *Spring Awakening* on the Department of Theatre's main stage. His work as dramaturg at the U of U includes *All My Sons*, *Sweeney Todd*, and *Stop Kiss*. His playwriting debut, *The Zion Curtain*, ran in January 2013 in Studio 115 on the U of U campus. He co-wrote the book and lyrics for *Pomp and Circumstance: A New Musical*, and has translated a number of plays by Juan Radrigán and other Chilean playwrights, as well as the book *Chilean Religious Drama* by Norma Alcamán Riffo. Curtis will be pursuing his MA in Theatre Studies at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama in London this fall and can be contacted at curtis.russell@gmail.com.

The rat kicked the cat's ass.

In a gutter in Valparaíso, Chile—and I have a photo as proof—an embattled rat answered every swipe of its foe's paw with a bite, over and over until the cat relented and each went on its way. Valparaíso, "Valpo" to those in the know, is a city where rats thrive while stray cats grow lean. It's not a dump, far from it, but it doesn't suffer from North America's plague of obsessive cleanliness. Valpo begins in the *plan* (from *plano*, Spanish for "flat"), the narrow downtown area that stretches the length of the city along a harbor teeming with battle cruisers, cargo ships, and tourist launches. Forty-two hills bloom from the *plan* and give Valpo its distinct character.

Roads, sometimes paved and sometimes not, snuggle around each bend and dip in the hills, lacking any discernible order. Houses painted any hue, the wilder the better, line the roads (or not), thousands upon thousands, often jutting at 90-degree angles from the hillsides and only making cursory contact with the land. The city is a strange ecosystem of wood and mud and air that defies anything as boring as logic or reason, the type of place where rats, engorged on the garbage that collects in the *quebradas* between the hills, can kick cats' asses with impunity. A vital South American port until the creation of the Panama Canal, Valparaíso, like Chile itself, is often like the rat, taking its licks but stubbornly refusing to die.

I was a 20-year-old Mormon missionary when I cheered on the rat, but I was a 33-year-old father when I stood in the same spot and told the story to my son, Xander, having returned to Chile to meet and study with Juan Radrigán, the master playwright who appeared out of necessity at the height of Pinochet's horrific military dictatorship.

I remembered perfectly the spot where cat and rat had tangled, a few yards from one of the countless curves of Avenida Alemania, which bisects and connects most of the hills. I was lucky to even find the battle



PHOTO: CURTIS RUSSELL

View of Valparaíso from the top of Ascensor Artillería, one of five functioning century-old funiculars in the city, which UNESCO declared a World Heritage Site. In the rear you can see many of Valparaíso's sprawling hills, three of which were recently ravaged by wildfire.

site, considering how much the area had changed in thirteen years. Large apartment blocks had sprung up, along with new roads and lookout points. Mud roads had become pavement. The red apartment blocks I raced home to every night in order to make curfew were there, but, wait, were there more? And where did that power station come from?

When I was a missionary, Chile was barely starting its second decade post-dictatorship. General Augusto Pinochet had left office in 1990, just 11 years before. Wanton murder and suppression of freedom and thought had characterized Pinochet's reign. Though I didn't realize it then, the country was still struggling to define itself.

Xander and I had spent most of the time during our three-month theatre research trip in Santiago, which was new to me, and only traveled to Valpo during the last week of the trip, after my wife Amanda had joined us and saved us from mutually assured destruction. Living with just him for three months was like living with an endlessly needy, dependent missionary companion.

But my companions never wet the bed.

I knew it was going to be a struggle, but I am a master compartmentalizer, and the difficulty of spending every waking (and sleeping) hour with a seven-year-old never completely dampened the excitement of introducing my child to a foreign country, one I knew and loved. We haunted museums, libraries, parks, monuments, playgrounds, universities, bookshops, junk food joints, churches, any place that sold a magnet or provided a good photo op, and it was marvelous.

Xander made each place his own by pretending to know things about them from "the kingdom days," an apparently glorious medieval age

in which he ruled all of South America. Though shy at first, he seemed to be growing into a little person in a way he never had or could at home. He spoke Spanish every day with more confidence and bravado to the employees of the minimarket on the corner where we bought our morning bread.

Yet here we were, standing next to a gutter, irritation simmering just beneath the surface. Earlier, beguiled by the view of Valpo's myriad hills from our hotel balcony, Xander had declared it The Greatest City in the World. But by the time we walked to the battle site, his joy had soured through my constant nagging to stay out of the road, look both ways, hold Mommy's hand.

In true dramaturg fashion, I wanted to help him understand Chile's recent history of military dictatorship and rocky path to freedom as simply and clearly as I could without instilling nightmares. But it wasn't easy.

How to help a child make sense of thousands of needless disappearances and deaths? How to make sense of it oneself?

The near-total lack of mention of the dictatorship years in the public spaces we visited compounded the difficulty. While many Chileans have made brave efforts to bring the events of those years to light, few are willing to talk about it.

Move on, get over it. Maybe that's how countries cope when their histories are violently, cruelly interrupted.

I never considered these things as a naïve missionary. Though I entered people's homes, my thoughts and actions centered on conversion, and I undoubtedly missed many opportunities to learn from people who



PHOTO: CURTIS RUSSELL

Street art in Valparaíso.

had suffered unbearable atrocities. In the years since, while skyscrapers were flowering in the hills of Valpo, and Chile was deciding to turn its back on memory and embrace capitalism, I had looked inward and decided to turn my back on my parents' religious tradition.

Ironically, being back in Chile and finally wanting to understand the Chilean people and their theatre, I had no reason to enter their homes and was left looking in from the outside, trying to understand and explain things to my son while second-guessing all the decisions I had made along the way and suppressing the urge to strangle him.

I found reason, and Chile found forgetfulness, but were either of us better off for it? Did reason make me a better father? Did forgetting make Chile a stronger country?

I felt like I was still watching the cat/rat fight, though I wasn't sure which was me and which was my son, or which was Chile and which was Pinochet.

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Juan Radrigán is the greatest living playwright nobody's ever heard of. That assertion may seem hyperbolic, but a quick survey of his accomplishments proves it: the foremost member of a group of playwrights to emerge under Pinochet's dictatorship, Radrigán has written more than 35 plays, the best-known of which, *Hechos Consumados* (*Finished From the Start*), earned Radrigán and his theatre company an invitation to the Nancy World Theatre Festival in France, and a nine-month European tour. The play was also turned into a film (Roark). He and his company toured South America. Radrigán won the Premio Altazor (Altazor Prize), a national arts award, in 2005 for *Beckett y Godot* (*Beckett and Godot*), a two-hander that imagines a conversation between Samuel Beckett and the subject of his most famous play in the basement of an abandoned theater ("Juan Radrigán"). He then went on to win the Premio Nacional de las Artes y la Representación (National Arts and Performance Prize), Chile's highest arts award, in 2011 (García).

Obviously, the claim of ignorance of Radrigán's work is an Anglo-centric one; he is well-known and much admired (though not uncontroversial) in

his home country. But his plays are rarely, if ever, performed in the United States, and a cursory search of the ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Database reveals a mere ten documents in which he receives at least a passing mention. Only one doctoral dissertation is devoted entirely to Radrigán's work, and it was written 15 years ago, in Spanish. Neither the public nor academia has given Radrigán's *oeuvre* the attention it merits.

Radrigán's playwriting career didn't begin until he was already in his 40s. Born Galvarino Radrigán Rojas in 1937 and nicknamed Juan, Radrigán received no formal education. He was home-taught by his mother, who instilled a love of reading and writing in him and his siblings. As he says, "I don't remember when I learned to read, but I do remember that my first readings were the sad eyes of my mother ... and hundreds of faces and bodies broken down by implacable poverty" ("Juan Radrigán, Premio Nacional").¹

Like Dickens, Radrigán had to enter the workforce early due to his family's financial straits, cementing his disgust with the inequities of life in a class-based society. He worked in everything from textile manufacturing to street vending and eventually became a labor union leader (Roark). Though these years gave him firsthand experience in the life of the underclasses and radicalized his views, in his typically pragmatic fashion, Radrigán disavows the idea that factory work provided him anything useful:

The factory doesn't give you anything, just anger. It gives you strikes and those things, but nothing that the street doesn't give you. Exploitation isn't a new thing, it's been around a long time and will continue into the future. I feel the same about exploitation and wickedness that I did 40 years ago. It's a crime to suffer, and guess who has to pay ... it's not God in any case. (Hermosilla)²

These themes run throughout Radrigán's entire body of work.

After the coup in 1973, labor organizing became unsafe. Radrigán published a poetry collection in the late 70s, but other than that, saw no success as a writer. He turned to playwriting almost on a whim:

(B)efore the poetry collection there was a period when I wrote stories but it's best that no trace of that remains. I went nowhere with the stories. They were utterly bad. Just like that I chose playwriting, I began to write theatre and I liked it...There are many authors that lose themselves in genres, then become comfortable in what they do best. I feel very comfortable writing theatre. (Martínez)³

Given the way the arts are often censored following military takeovers, one would imagine playwriting as dangerous a profession as labor or

¹ "No recuerdo cuando aprendí a leer, pero sí recuerdo que mis primeras lecturas fueron los tristísimos ojos de mi madre ... y cientos de rostros y cuerpos averiados por una implacable pobreza."

² "La fábrica no te da nada, pura rabia no más. Te da huelgas y esas cosas, pero nada que no te dé la calle. La explotación no es cosa de ahora, viene desde muy atrás y va a seguir. Yo opino sobre la explotación y la bellaquería exactamente lo mismo que opinaba hace 40 años. Es un delito sufrir, y adivina quiénes tienen que pagar ... No es Dios en todo caso."

³ "(A)ntes del poemario hubo un período donde escribí cuentos pero mejor que no exista recuerdos sobre eso. Es que con los cuentos no iba a ninguna parte. Era rematadamente malo. Como de la nada opté por la dramaturgia, empecé a escribir teatro y me gusto. Hay muchos autores que se pierden en los géneros, entonces uno se acomoda en lo que mejor puede hacer. Yo me siento muy cómodo escribiendo teatro."

ganizing, but Radrigán goes on to explain that the opposite was true:

The political problems were latent, of course, but they didn't bother us much. Something could be worked out. There was a document from the CNI⁴ that said that they shouldn't censor theatre, nor persecute it, but place themselves in opposition to it by proposing another theatre. Obviously they didn't have anyone to write for them, because the military can't do anything besides cleaning cannons and killing people. They didn't provide much opposition because they thought theatre was elitist, for a small public; luckily they were very wrong. (Martínez)⁵

In this atmosphere, Radrigán began churning out play after play, often writing for only the most basic of sets and one or two actors. Though the government kept theatre on a long leash, playwrights still had to be sly in their subversion of authority. The style Radrigán developed in those early years is one of bleak but occasionally darkly funny realism, punctuated by theatrical flourishes, and always subtly testifying to the abuse of power by Pinochet's government by giving its victims a human face.

Radrigán's early plays fall firmly in the Latin American genre of "testimonio," as discussed by Ana Elena Puga, translator and editor of the only volume of Radrigán's plays currently published in English:

Though rooted in actual political injustice, "testimonio" (italicization changed by author) may be fictional: it may take narrative or theatrical form, and it may use poetic language to help position the individual character as a synecdoche for his or her community. (Puga xviii)

Radrigán's first play, the earliest of his "testimonio" plays, has the word right in the title: *Testimonio de las muertes de Sabina* (*Testimony to the Deaths of Sabina*). In it, an old married couple, Rafael and Sabina, deal with the emotional fallout when they receive a mysterious citation about their fruit stand.

Sabina's death is never seen, only hinted at, and the ominous sound of approaching footsteps grows louder between each act. The message of oppression by a faceless dictatorship is clear. From his very first play, Radrigán established himself as a writer of control and subtlety, speaking truth about power to his working class audiences without preaching or hectoring.

In *Las brutas* (*The Beasts*), based on a true story, three sisters living in the wilderness struggle to maintain their independence in an increasingly mystifying and dehumanized world. Unable to adapt, they take their own lives, again unseen but implied at the end of the play.

In *Hechos Consumados* (*Finished From the Start*), Radrigán's best-known work, Emilio and Marta, a pair of strangers, sit on the outskirts

⁴ Centro de Información Nacional (National Information Center), similar to the CIA, FBI, and Secret Service.

⁵ "Los problemas políticos estaban latentes, por supuesto, pero no molestaban demasiado. Algo se podía trabajar. Había un documento de la CNI que decía que no había que censurar el teatro, no perseguirle, sino oponerse al proponer otro teatro. Obviamente no tenían alguien que les escribiera, porque los milicos aparte de limpiar cañones y matar gente no saben hacer ninguna cosa más. Mucha oposición no le hicieron porque pensaron que el teatro era elitista por el poco público; lo bueno es que ellos estaban muy equivocados."



PHOTO: AMANDA RUSSELL

The author with smile-averse playwright Juan Radrigán.

of a city, watching a long line of displaced people on a forced pilgrimage to an unknown destination. That line of people become the protagonists of 1986's *Pueblo del mal amor* (*Village of Bad Love*).

Radrigán has said about the theatre:

Today something really terrible is happening: the owners (of theaters) or the producers, it isn't that they've moved towards the right, but today they whitewash, depoliticize, and decaffeinate the work. They don't want to offend or lose projects and that's very bad for the theatre, because once again only the independent theatre will be able to say anything. (Martínez)⁶

In today's Occupy era, Radrigán's political, caffeinated, and decidedly un-whitewashed work is as vital as ever.

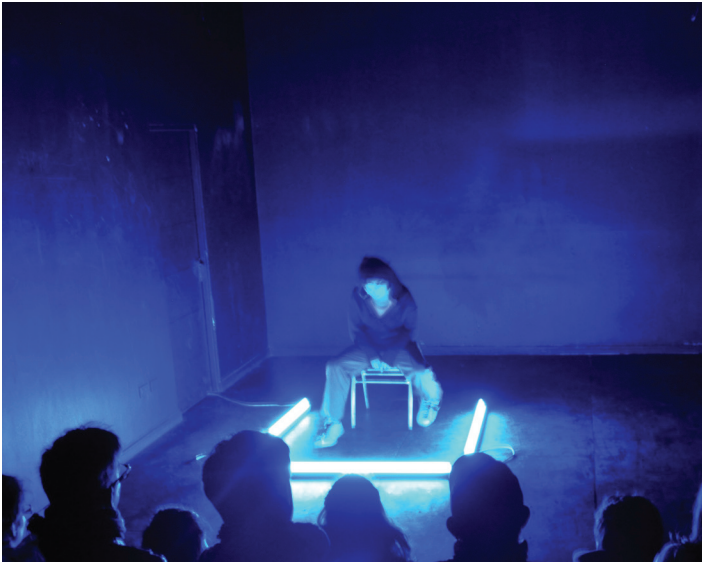
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This legacy weighed on me as I waited nervously to meet the playwright I so admired. My corroded Spanish notwithstanding, Radrigán had agreed to meet me for lunch at the Bellas Artes metro stop in Santiago, around the corner from my apartment. Bellas Artes is an ultrahip, café-lined sector of the city built around the neo-classical National Fine Arts Museum that gives it its name.

I was so nervous that I barely noticed the squat 75-year-old man shuffling up to Xander and me on the arm of his teenage daughter. Radrigán's soft-spoken, pensive, yet jovial demeanor belies his stature in the theatre world. As I discovered over the course of lunch, Juan is not only one of the greatest living playwrights in the world, he is also one of the nicest. Interviews and conversations with his colleagues over the next three months only confirmed this impression. All agreed that Radrigán, though cantankerous when defending his choices as a playwright, is a decent human being. He is quick to laugh, which stems in part from hearing loss.

He and his wife, Silvia Marín, a member of Radrigán's company in the 80s, welcomed us into the fourth-floor walk-up they call home the first week of the trip. The walls of the three-bedroom flat with sagging floors and well-used furniture are covered with posters from productions of

⁶ "Hoy está pasando una cosa bien cabrona: los dueños (quienes tienen salas de teatro) o los que tienen algún puesto, no es que se hayan derechizado pero hoy las obras las blanquean, las despolitizan, las descafeinan. Cosa de no ofender ni de perder proyectos y eso es muy malo para el teatro, porque va a tener que afincarse otra vez solo en el teatro independiente para poder decir cosas."



A student production of *Obra Doloriento* by Alejandra Iturriaga in Radrigán's playwriting workshop at the Catholic University of Chile. Pictured: Camila Santander

his plays throughout the years. The corner bedroom serves as his office, where he writes the first drafts of his plays by hand. High-rise apartment buildings mottle what used to be a great view from the balcony. Radrigán's home, like his personality, seems incongruent with his stature; for all he has accomplished, he deserves to live larger and be a lot more ill-mannered. Perhaps it's because he had already lived a full and hard life by the time he began writing, but whatever the reason, he and his little family helped a couple of *gringos* feel less alone in the big city.

He wasn't perfect, though. It was with relief, in fact, that I discovered Radrigán to be as prejudiced as the rest of us. Despite his tireless defense of the defenseless, he had no trouble blaming Santiago's drug problem on undocumented immigrants. He was also perfectly happy to sneak me cigarettes when Xander wasn't looking.⁷ And though my purpose in traveling to Chile was to learn from him and study his life and plays, over time it became clear that he wasn't willing to give me too much of his time.

Xander and I attended his weekly playwriting course at the Universidad Católica and Radrigán graciously took me to a production of his latest play, *Ceremonial del macho cabrío* (*The Billy Goat's Rite*) at Matucana 100, one of Santiago's dynamic new art spaces. We arrived early so he could show me around and introduce me to the director and actors. While we sat and drank coffee and smoked cigarettes I asked him about his father. He said he didn't remember much about him beyond his propensity for jokes. An itinerant laborer, he deserted the family when Juan was seven years old, Xander's age. Juan called that his best joke of all.

Beyond that night and our weekly classes, contact was scarce. Xander, who had become enamored of Radrigán's teen daughter when they bonded over a mutual love of Pokémon, continually asked me when we would go back to their house. Every time I had to admit that I didn't know.

The old playwright's busy schedule is understandable. His plays have been in demand since he won the National Arts Prize in 2011, and he

⁷ If anything, though, this illustrated the depths of his compassion. I'm not a smoker, but damn it if sometimes a little nicotine isn't all that's needed to avoid parental apocalypse. Coffee and cigarettes with Juan Radrigán is a remarkable elixir.

writes for a minimum of four hours every day in his corner room. He also often tells his students that his mentoring doesn't end with the class, encouraging them to continue sending him their work with questions. He gets right to the heart of what is wrong with each piece, and his message is always to simplify, tell a story, and give the audience someone to sympathize with.

With a dramaturg's adaptability and pluck, I plunged headlong into other research and translation projects, determined to make the most of my adventure and immerse myself in Chilean theatre despite the lack of contact with Radrigán.

Along my way to collecting 2,500 articles and 66 books' worth of research (all of which had to be lugged home), Xander and I discovered Cerro San Cristóbal (San Cristóbal Hill) with its rickety funicular and endless views of the city (at least on the non-smoggy days). We wandered the Parque de las Esculturas (Sculpture Park) across the Mapocho River from the Gran Torre Santiago, the tallest building in Latin America and the second tallest in the Southern Hemisphere. We visited soccer stadiums, children's museums, and torture and interrogation centers from the Pinochet era—one a stone's-throw from the presidential palace. These memory spaces almost single-handedly carry the torch for the victims of Pinochet's regime.

Though the military quashed all voices of dissent during the dictatorship, Chile once again enjoys a strong tradition of civic engagement. Xander and I witnessed marches in Santiago, for everything from gay rights to better pay for postal workers. The chanting of the Popular Unity years from 1970–1973 has been replaced with jubilant drums and horns. Chileans of every stripe don't just proclaim their politics, they perform them. The streets were the most vibrant stage I experienced.

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The position of dramaturg has only recently been introduced in Chile. My friend Soledad Lagos has done great pioneering work in the field, as profiled in the April-June 2013 issue of *Conjunto*, the Latin American theatre journal published by Casa de las Américas in Havana. Since the word for playwright in Spanish is *dramaturga*, dramaturgs here are known as *dramaturgistas*.

There are no stage managers in Chile. The entire cast and crew is involved in the creative process from the beginning; the technicians simply know their jobs and everyone is required to participate in every step of the process.

Chile's geographical isolation has created insularity in its art and culture. Many works speak of "we" and "our," meaning "Chileans." This narrowness of focus is also reflected in the content of their plays and stories, which reference specifically Chilean locations and events. The result is a pulsating, viable national drama, but one resistant to translation. Radrigán's early plays, written in the poetry of the underclasses, are especially difficult to translate.

Yet we as theatre professionals can learn much from the Chilean theatre. There is a wealth of dramatic material waiting to be uncovered. Playwrights like Marco Antonio de la Parra, Juan Claudio Burgos, Manuela Infante, Cristián Soto, Leonardo Gonzalez, Ana Harcha Cor-



Xander with a member of the Palace Guard during a tour of La Moneda, the presidential palace in downtown Santiago.

tés, Guillermo Calderón, and Luis Barrales are churning out important bodies of work that demand attention. Staggering work is also being done by academics like Lagos, Cristián Opazo, Eduardo Guerrero del Río, Juan Andrés Piña, Paulo Olivares, and many others.

As the world embraces the virtues of the marketplace over the humane and compassionate, the need grows daily for strong, meaningful dramatic material to help us make sense of, and change, this strange new world. We would be wise to turn our eyes to our neighbors way down south.

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Somehow, Xander and I survived. He seemed to internalize the mantra I gave him (which would be useful for dramaturgs as well): It's different, I'll adapt.

My son returned with (mostly) positive memories, and I returned with a suitcase full of research to begin processing, along with new friends and professional connections.

I think I'm a better father now, but I'm not sure. I believe I'm a better dramaturg. I hope I'm a better person. My world is bigger.

Santiago's six million inhabitants go about their lives as if I'd never been there. Factories churn, students absorb, marchers march. The sea breezes roll up the Valpo hills every morning as new concrete giants shoot their roots into the ground. Life spins, and progress resumes its terrible march.

What hope could we as theatre-makers possibly have against such odds?

Once, in class, Radrigán's teaching assistant asked Juan if he had any comments for a student playwright. Juan said, "He should write poetry."

I think he was joking.

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DEVELOPING WORK

Behind the Scenes in Bollywood: An Interview with Brian Quirt

By Laurel Green

Laurel Green is Artistic Associate at Alberta Theatre Projects where she is the head of new play development and a production dramaturg. With ATP she has dramaturged a Bollywood musical (*Same Same But Different*), a new translation (*You Will Remember Me*), a hip hop musical (*Ash Rizin*), a Bacchanalian rock 'n roll cabaret (*The God That Comes*), a new play by Joan MacLeod (*The Valley*), and learned a heck of a lot about Mark Rothko as the assistant director for *Red*. She also organizes The Exchange, ATP's audience enrichment program. Laurel holds a Masters in Drama from the University of Toronto, and she is also an active board member for LMDA Canada.

Some of her favourite recent projects include: *The Distance Between You and I—A Bike Ride with Stories* (Humble Wonder Theatre), *The Passion of Sergius & Bacchus* (Third Street Theatre), *Attack of the Pine Beetles!* (Evergreen Theatre), *Collapsible* (mi casa theatre). *The Trojan Women* (Western Canada High School). You can follow her on Twitter @LGYYC.

Drawing on the vivid storytelling devices of Bollywood cinema, *Same Same But Different* (*S2BD*) by Anita Majumdar comprises two self-contained but intersecting one-act plays infused with music and dance. Commissioned and developed by Nightswimming Theatre, in collaboration with Theatre Passe Muraille and Alberta Theatre Projects, *S2BD* premiered in February 2014. Brian Quirt, the show's director and dramaturg, sat down with ATP's Artistic Associate Laurel Green to talk about working in a new dance vocabulary and how he gained an appreciation for the boldness of Bollywood along the way.

Laurel Green: Brian, how did you get involved with this project?

Brian Quirt: I started working with Anita Majumdar some years ago on a show by Anosh Irani called *Bombay Black* (2006), which required a young woman actor who was also trained in classical Indian dance. When the show was programmed and we started looking for actors, Anita was touring with her show *Fish Eyes* that displays her talents as both an actor and a dancer, and so we cast her immediately. I got to know Anita, and while we worked together we talked about her writing and the other shows she was working on. On and off she would tell me about this piece of writing called *Aisha and Ben*, after the two main characters. Aisha was a Canadian actor who has gone to Bollywood and come back to film a movie in Vancouver, and Ben is a [half-Filipino, half-Spanish] backup dancer who is star struck and pursuing her. I was interested in the voice of the main character, which is really bold and brassy, powerful and complicated. Nightswimming has done a lot of pieces over the years with dance in them and commissioned pure dance pieces as well, so the idea of talking with Anita more seriously about this piece that incorporated text and dance on equal footing was really interesting to me.

LG: Anita is the playwright, choreographer and star of *S2BD*; how did you balance working with her as both a writer and a dancer while creating this piece?

BQ: Anita decided to put aside all the previous material that she'd written for these characters and we rented a dance studio for an autumn, meeting there once a week. I would lead Anita through writing exercises focused on those two characters, and so she started writing the play again from scratch. Because we were in a dance studio we did all the writing surrounded by the opportunity of dance whether she chose to dance or not on that given day. The environment for creation was meant to be equal for both components of the piece. Over the course of those 3 or 4 months she wrote a first draft of a play called *Aisha and Ben* [which has now become the first act of *S2BD*] and we performed that in Vancouver as part of the Cultural Olympiad in 2009. When we went back to rehearse that piece, we had text and we had places and sketches for the dances. Anita just started to choreograph those for herself and the other actor, and that was the beginning of my serious education in terms of Bollywood dance.

LG: So you weren't a Bollywood expert when you began working on the project?

BQ: I came to this piece not even "not an expert," I was less than an expert but I've never felt like that's a bad thing as a dramaturg or director. Anita is the expert. As a dancer and choreographer she is deeply immersed in Bollywood, and as a spectator she loves it in the way that so many people do, as both an aficionado of the dance and then as someone who either grew up dancing those types of dances or always wanted to. The opportunity to release her into it was like – go: make the dances, pick the music! I responded very much as a dramaturg, sharing my understanding of what the character was doing, sequences and physical phrases that I thought were evocative or thrilling or sexy and conveyed the visceral appeal that Bollywood is about on so many levels. What I call the "radical entertainment of Bollywood." In those early versions there wasn't much story in the dances, nor did there need to be. In general, Bollywood doesn't worry about that to the same degree at all. I call what I do on a lot of projects "constructive ignorance." I have the opportunity and the need to ask the really obvious questions about the nature of the reference or the nature of a pose and Anita will either explicate or correct me, or challenge the assumptions I've made. That becomes a really healthy dialogue between expertise on her part and a quest to understand the tools on my part.

LG: How is dance used in Bollywood?

BQ: The Bollywood industry is just as content to use dance as punctuation or rhythm, to change tone, to relieve tension or to generate tension. The exception is that often the love story is expanded through the dance. You'll see the lovers enact a set of emotions that propriety and rank in their world doesn't allow them to express. The dance does, and then they snap back into their more controlled environment. Part of the work for me was resisting the urge to make everything have story and content. [So I would ask instead] is this dance number in the right place? Does the music that Anita's chosen set the right tone either in contrast or compliment? Is there any narrative that we need to cover in what happens between the two characters in the dance? If not, then what do the dances have to do to reward us for the three or four minutes that we're watching dance and not story? We're always watching character, so dance can certainly tell you something about characters, especially in a duet.



Anita Majumdar and Brian Quirt in rehearsal.

PHOTO: NIRE BAREKET

LG: How do you satisfy both the newcomers and the hardcore fans in the audience?

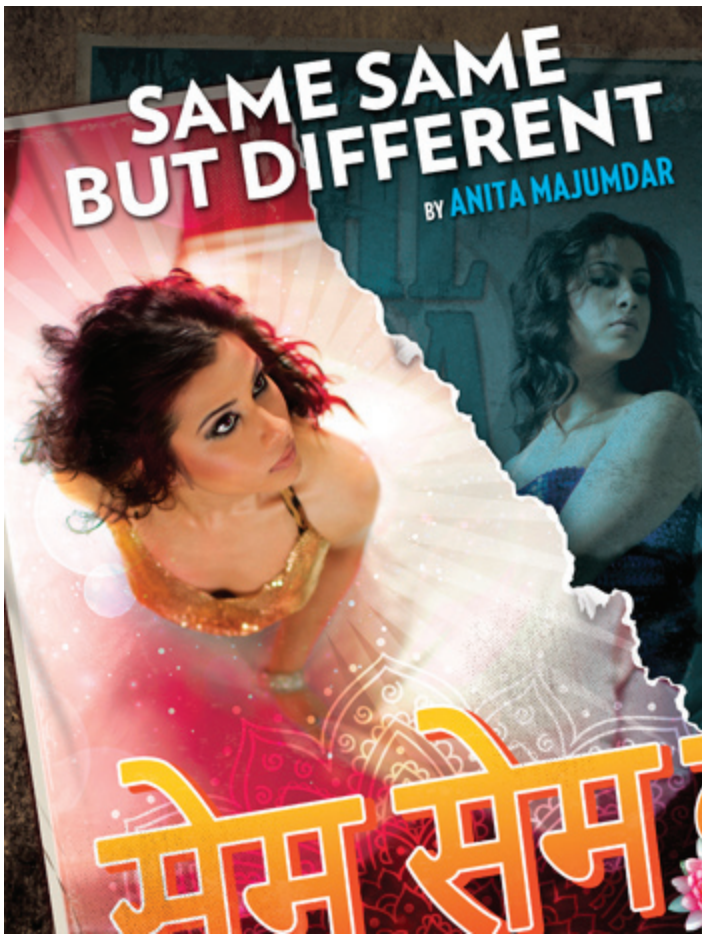
BQ: Separating the singing from the dancing can be strange certainly for some audiences that are not used to that convention [in Bollywood lead actors dance and songs are recorded separately by playback singers in studios], and most of the song lyrics in *S2BD* are in Hindi so there's another layer of distance from the content of the songs that generate the dance. This puts even more focus and emphasis on the body, what the bodies are doing with each other in the case of the duets. For people who speak Hindi and for people who are knowledgeable of Bollywood there become these other layers of engagement that we decided would be bonuses. Bollywood, like so many storytelling forms, uses archetypes all over the place. There's a scene in *S2BD* where two characters do a photo shoot and it takes the form of a dance where they alternately create iconic Bollywood postures. For someone not familiar with the things that they're referencing you get the sense of escalating competition and for those who are familiar with the world of the Bollywood language you understand the quotes and the series of references that accumulate. If we do our job correctly we satisfy both customers.

LG: What excites you most about Bollywood storytelling?

BQ: I think the freedom is the thing that sticks with me; the richness of colour, of spectacle, of huge crowds of people in the musical numbers. I love the love of lavishness, sometimes totally for its own sake, which I admire, and the willingness to use really bold and sometimes very obvious imagery like the sun and the moon, who are frequent visitors. Even in a very serious Bollywood film the realization and the awareness that entertainment is a huge priority regardless of whether the content happens to be political or social or domestic or fun. That's a lesson we would all do well to remember as we sometimes create work that forgets to be entertaining.

LG: In *S2BD* there are only two actors onstage in contrast to the multitudes we're used to seeing in a typical Bollywood film. What opportunities arise in such an intimate piece?

BQ: In the first act of the show the scenario is that they are shooting a Bollywood film, so if you were seeing the cinematic version, there



Poster image from *Same Same But Different* at Alberta Theatre Projects

would probably be dozens of background dancers surrounding the central two characters in our play. The distillation of it means that we watch every move that these two make and so it ups the ante for us but also gives us an opportunity to convey information in all those small moves. Where does nuance start to enter into that? You can watch a Bollywood dance [on film] and because you're meant to be involved by many layers of things to watch you can never pick all of them up at the same time. We don't have that luxury, so we make that an advantage. In *S2BD* we watch every detail of these two people dancing, and it becomes about whether our focus goes to someone's leg or shoulder, or to the way an arm is held or how they touch one another. Every small detail becomes amplified in our world.

LG: I can't help but marvel at the effort of the dance numbers, which are beautiful, lavish, and quite physical. I found myself noticing every drop of sweat!

BQ: One of the ancillary goals is that you both watch the magic and the effort that it takes to make the magic simultaneously. You watch a play that is critical of the context that makes the magic through the prioritization of light-skinned female stars, and the unspoken rules around things that aren't part of the magic but are part of the nightmare that the industry believes is necessary to create the magic.

LG: The playwright pulls no punches critiquing the pigmentocracy of the Bollywood star system—how does *S2BD* keep its politics in perspective?

BQ: Well I think because the play is set (in the first act) on a Bollywood

film set in Canada, it distances itself geographically from India so it allows itself a perspective on the industry that places such oppression requirements on women in particular, not only about how they look but literally who they are in terms of their skin colour. Anita's been quite ingenious about finding a zone that allows commentary on both of those worlds, which I see as sharing issues around shadeism and the rights and place of women. Oppression in the entertainment industry is really just a version of each society.

LG: What excites you most about an audience seeing the show when it premieres?

BQ: I'm excited by entertaining an audience even as we hope to outrage them about some of the political and sexual gender ideas. I don't want those issues to push audiences away; in fact, I want the opposite. I want people to be drastically and thoroughly, radically entertained by the piece even as they're incited or activated or infuriated by the situations that the characters are trapped in or caught in or struggling to get out of. That's part of the delicious thing that song and dance can offer. [We are currently working on a moment in Act 1 where] Anita's character is given a bottle of skin bleaching acid (for lack of a more tactful word) by the director of the film. Anita wants to apply the tools of Bollywood to that moment so it becomes about physicalizing the action, literally choreographing the character's response to that bottle, the importance of it and her relationship with this thing. I imagine that this will be a very beautiful image at odds with the fact that she's confronting someone saying to her "you need to have lighter skin and you need to have it now otherwise you're worthless." That's a really interesting example of how when we're heading into production we can use our tools to make that moment something that an audience will understand more effectively. In *S2BD* beauty can be a tool to understand the worst and the harshest things.

For more information about *Same Same But Different* visit Nightswimmingtheatre.com.



PHOTO: MICHAEL COOPER

Antony Malarky and Anita Majumdar in *Same Same But Different* at Theatre Passe Muraille.

DEVELOPING WORK

National Theatre: Center Stage's *My America* Project

by **Gavin Witt**

In the spring of 2012, in celebration of its 50th Anniversary, Center Stage asked some of the country's leading and emerging playwrights to answer a simple question: What is my America? Filmed by Possible Films, led by award-winning director Hal Hartley, the resulting monologues explore our particular American moment—the ideas and people that make the country what it is today. Their responses, ranging from the political to the personal, form a tapestry of ideas, a snapshot of our nation through the eyes of its playwrights.

Thus culminated one of the more ambitious, arguably hare-brained, schemes we've devised in the past few decades at Center Stage. It called for a host of dramaturgical resources, from the initial framing of a question and scheme for the project to the curation of a list of participants, from the collaborative development for each of more than 50 new plays to the context and conditions of their distribution. How on earth did this come to pass?

It's still 2011, late summer, and Center Stage in Baltimore has its first new artistic director in 20 years, Kwame Kwei-Armah. He's a playwright, and British; furthermore, he's new to America and to this particular role. How, then, to understand this new home (locally and nationally), and at the same time make a tangible commitment to playwrights and new work? Additionally, the theater is poised to celebrate its 50th anniversary season, and the country is about to embark on one of our quadrennial bouts of electoral soul-searching. Can any one project synthesize all these considerations?

In an early discussion, Kwame notes that, if he wants to know a place beyond the superficial or the conventional, he asks the artists. Through them, he observes, can come a deeper and a broader perspective, or more probing ruminations on a national psyche, zeitgeist, or state of mind. So we frame a seemingly simple question—What, or Where, is *your* America?—and set out to pose this to playwrights. And we give our fledgling project a name: *My America*.

The first notion for *My America* is to partner with three peer re-

Gavin Witt, Associate Artistic Director/Director of Dramaturgy, came to Center Stage in 2003 as Resident Dramaturg, having served in that role previously at several Chicago theaters. As a dramaturg, he has worked on well over 60 plays, from classics to new commissions—including play development workshops and freelance dramaturgy for TCG, The Playwrights Center, The New Harmony Project, The Old Globe, Bay Area Playwrights Festival, Contemporary American Theatre Festival, the Kennedy Center, and others. A graduate of Yale and the University of Chicago, he was active in Chicago theater for more than a decade as an actor, director, dramaturg, translator, and teacher, not to mention co-founder of greasy joan & co. theater, while serving as a regional Vice President of LMDA, the national association of dramaturgs. He has been on the faculty of the University of Chicago and DePaul University, and currently teaches at Towson University.

gional theaters to represent North, South, East, and West. Together, this foursome will co-commission four writers to create a set of related pieces, then jointly and simultaneously premiere the results in four separate productions. Out goes the call to the chosen partners. No response. On to the next notion: ask 50 writers (50 states, 50 years of Center Stage) to craft short monologues in response to the question, then film or publish the results. Bingo.

An initial pass at a list of writers comes up with well over a hundred names. Impractical, and even at a mere pittance of a stipend, far more than the project's budget allows. But at Center Stage, we know we want to ensure 10% local representation among the writers. We know we want 50 of them, but have no clue what the rate of response will be on the invitation—so how many to ask initially? And we certainly know we want some gender balance, as well as a diverse range of voices, ages, races, perspectives, career trajectories, styles, origins, political persuasions, and other qualities. So whittle, whittle goes the list, until finally out go the asks. And what an inspiring, encouraging response; even those who have to decline, do so while at least *seeming* to endorse the idea itself. Still, the proof will be in the results.

Even with the positive response, however, there are constant disappointments. Folks we are dying to enlist, who are just too busy to sign on. Names without which the list feels woefully incomplete, but which far outstrip our capacity to attract. Discerning and pursuing the best channel to make contact sometimes overshadows all other concerns. We try a short list of non-theatrical, even non-fiction, writers, but to no avail. Among the toughest challenges, we're hoping to include a spectrum of political outlooks but find explicitly conservative voices harder to secure. Thank you, Jeremy Karaken, for agreeing to represent the Playwriting Right.

Time marches forward and yeses come steadily in—along with a few initial scripts. Meantime, though, Phase Two looms. With the writers writing, we need to cast and film the results. Thanks to the small-world network, indie legend Hal Hartley has generously agreed to tackle the shooting—effectively donating his services to this thrifty, quixotic endeavor. More than a few writers, and soon actors as well, sign on for this reason alone. Additionally, beyond some added leverage with artists, with this added vision we gain a singular defining aesthetic for the audiovisual component of the exercise. Encompassing the widely disparate submissions, Hartley provides a unifying dimension.

By now the new year has rolled around and it is early spring of 2012. Drafts are due. Amazingly, more than 90% of the writers come through. One, Neil LaBute, even sends two pieces. Lynn Nottage responds not with the proposed two-to-three-minute short, but with a 20-minute solo play. We read and re-read, and send a few notes to a batch of the authors. Soon it's time to put actors into our makeshift studios—in New York and Los Angeles—and roll the camera.

Even before shooting starts, though, and the marvelous actors work their magic, what the playwrights send is simply astonishing in its range. Two things have happened, principally. First, playwrights have—as we hoped and dared to expect—understood the question, explored the idea of what or where is their America, in more ways than we dreamed possible. Second, they have found a stun-

ning range of forms in which to express their reflections. There are deeply personal musings on the state of our nation, directly tackling our question with hope, anger, bitterness, nostalgia, whimsy, humor, and a host of other vivid reactions up and down the scale. There are texts as meta as you can get, including reflections on the initial ask itself or the struggle to formulate a response. There are highly theatrical allusions and buried allegories that barely seem to glance at the original inquiry. There are pieces that offer answers, and pieces that reframe the query to pose new questions.

Formal diversity proves just as broad, as the writers account for viewer and listener in profoundly different ways. There are direct-address soliloquies. There are overheard conversations, phone calls, or exchanges. There are internal monologues spoken aloud, and public screeds, and private letters read privately. We overhear one side of dialogues, or become second party in a conversation. There are playwrights who speak in their own personas, and those who construct every manner of fictive intermediary. Polly Penn sends a musical, of course.

We end up with just over 50 finished scripts, most of which get filmed; a few roll out in printed form, and a few others get performed live. The finished products release in periodic waves over a span of weeks. All get curated for our in-house Media Wall (the newly designated Fourth Space, part of a broader multimedia and online initiative Kwame has introduced), as well as on a dedicated *My America* website (<http://myamerica.centerstage.org/>). There you can, of course, find the playwrights in alphabetical order. But should you wish, you can explore them plotted by hometown on a map, or trace various thematically tagged associations to take you from one to another, such as “transportation and travel,” “consumption,” “immigration and migration,” “house and home(land),” “race and class,” “the American Dream,” “cleanliness,” and others. Online, there are playwright bios, as well as a variety of additional dramaturgical glosses and annotations for selected pieces. Then the films also populate YouTube for a more casual, populist encounter.

Now here we are in 2014, with a measure of retrospect. From glimmer to given, the project has grown to an initial fruition. What, then, is its legacy?

- 1) Hal Hartley decided to select some of the pieces and compile them into a feature film. Despite enormous hurdles (just picture the rights issues on this one, from that many actors, agents, authors, and unions) he submitted a finished cut to Sundance in 2013, with more festival submissions planned.
- 2) At least two, perhaps more, of the authors have gone on to create full-length scripts from germs seeded in their *My America* monologues.
- 3) Directly inspired by this project, we received funding to initiate a comparable educational version with area schools. Students were asked to reflect on their perceptions or visions of Baltimore (and America), and write personal monologues. Out of hundreds of submissions, several were again selected for filming or live performance as the *My America/My Baltimore* series—which also continue to run on our lobby Media Wall.
- 4) Still posted on YouTube, the original videos endure online and continue to gather viewings and responses, showcasing some wonderful writing by some of the best established and emerging voices in the country.

In retrospect, we particularly celebrate a few elements of this endeavor. In it, we created, cultivated, and celebrated relationships with more than 50 playwrights (and as many actors). For an AD new to the job, let alone the country, this meant an extraordinary boost; and for a regional theater with limited commissioning funds, it meant generating exponentially more new work than usual. As part of the larger endeavor of the Fourth Space—committed to exploring more virtual, digital, and multimedia theater—*My America* was a significant first step. More than anything, though, everyone at Center Stage remains tremendously proud to have helped catalyze and curate such a kaleidoscopic, multi-hued portrait of a moment in the life of America—a moment seen through the eyes of so many established and emerging playwrights, spoken in such a clamorous multitude of disparate voices, and made accessible so broadly. More than we ever dared to hope for.

To explore Center Stage's *My America* project, visit <http://myamerica.centerstage.org/>

DEVELOPING WORK

Crowdsourcing a New *Hamburg Dramaturgy*

By **Wendy Arons, Natalya Baldyga,
and Michael Chemers**

A preview of *The Hamburg Dramaturgy:
A New & Complete English Translation*
Ed. **Natalya Baldyga**, Trans. **Wendy Arons & Sara Figal**

Wendy Arons is Associate Professor of Dramatic Literature at Carnegie Mellon University. She is author of *Performance and Femininity in Eighteenth-Century German Woman's Writing: The Impossible Act*, and has published articles in *Theatre Topics*, *The German Quarterly*, *Communications from the International Brecht Society, 1650-1850*, *Text and Presentation*, and *Theatre Journal*. She has worked as a professional dramaturg with a number of leading directors, including Anne Bogart and Robert Falls, and has translated a number of plays from German into English, including *The Good Person of Sezuan* in collaboration with Tony Kushner.

Natalya Baldyga is Assistant Professor in the Department of Drama and Dance at Tufts University. Her primary research focuses on theatre historiography, cultural identity, and the performing body in eighteenth-century Europe. Her essays have been published in the anthology *Public Theatres and Theatre Publics* and *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Theater*. Forthcoming are an entry on nationalism and theatre for *Wiley Encyclopedia of British Literature 1660-1789* and over thirty entries on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German actors for the *Cambridge World Encyclopedia of Stage Actors and Acting*.

Michael Chemers is the author of *Ghost Light: An Introductory Handbook for Dramaturgy* and was the founding Director of the BFA in Production Dramaturgy at Carnegie Mellon University. He is a scholar of theatre history and theory as well as a dramaturg, adaptor, and playwright. He is currently a professor of Dramatic Literature at the University of California at Santa Cruz.

Most people who study and practice dramaturgy likely first encountered Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Hamburg Dramaturgy* at some point in their educations. Perhaps there was a snippet assigned as part of an undergraduate theater history course, a more in-depth exploration in a graduate seminar, or even deeper research in preparation for one of Lessing's plays. The collection of 101 short essays Lessing wrote in support of the Hamburg National Theater between 1767-1769 has played an important role in theater history, having been regularly mined for its insights over the last two centuries by playwrights and critics such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Friedrich Schiller, and George Bernard Shaw, among hundreds of others, and it continues to speak to the concerns of theater artists and scholars in the present day. But unless students of dramaturgy have the ability to read the text in the original German, it is unlikely that they have had a genuinely satisfactory or complete exposure to this text that many consider a seminal document of theater history.

The problem is one of translation. The *Hamburg Dramaturgy* has been translated into English only once, by the German-British intellectual Helen Zimmern (1846-1939). Zimmern was born in Hamburg to a Jewish family who sought to escape German anti-Semitism by immigrating to England in 1849. A prolific, eclectic writer, Zimmern became a prominent biographer, historian, and translator; hers were some of the first widely read English translations of Nietzsche. Zimmern also wrote essays that excoriated Germans for anti-Semitism.¹ Small wonder, then, that her oeuvre would include Lessing, long esteemed by German Jews as a champion of their human rights. In 1878, Zimmern produced *The Dramatic Works of G. E. Lessing*, which includes a glowing biography of Lessing. In 1890 she produced the first and only English translation to date of the *Hamburg Dramaturgy*, as "Dramatic Notes" in *Selected Prose Works of G.E. Lessing* published by Bohn's Standard Library. This translation was reprinted, essentially

¹ For more on Zimmern, see C. A. Creffield, "Zimmern, Helen (1846-1934)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/55284>, accessed 20 Dec 2013]

unaltered, by Dover Books in 1962. Victor Lange, in his introduction to the Dover edition, admits that “the present translation ... has certain disadvantages” and refers to the translation as “somewhat archaic”; he ends with the reflection that:

The sad truth is to date no one has attempted to prepare a new translation. It is to be hoped that the appearance of the *Hamburg Dramaturgy* at the present time will encourage translators to offer more satisfying English versions of Lessing’s works. (xxi)

Dover reprinted the text in 1982, again unchanged, and until now no one has taken up Lange’s challenge.

Apart from the rather stultified and stuffy language, another “certain disadvantage” is that the translation contains substantial edits: not only does it completely omit 19 of the original 101 essays that make up the *Hamburg Dramaturgy*, but it also eliminates material from thirty percent of the remaining essays. These omissions include the majority of Lessing’s discussion of specific performances (with their careful descriptions of the actors’ physicality and vocal choices). What Zimmern chose to transmit is of great value, of course: Lessing’s theoretical and philosophical insights, his aesthetics, his literary criticism, his analysis of Aristotle, and other topics that connect him to the learned discourses of Enlightenment scholars and to the playwrights of the German canon who followed in his footsteps. In short, Zimmern showcases Lessing the philosopher, but leaves in the shadows a great deal of material that is of real interest to practitioners and scholars of the performing arts.² Omitting Lessing’s inquiry into stage practice presents a lopsided view of his endeavor, however, and dismisses the actual dramaturgy of the *Hamburg Dramaturgy*. Finally, Zimmern’s translation does not provide much at all in the way of editorial apparatus, so for a reader who is not well versed already in eighteenth-century acting styles, dramatic theory, aesthetics, and German dramatic literature, much of the text remains rather opaque.

Our project attempts to redress these problems by providing a complete *Hamburg Dramaturgy* for scholars, dramaturgs, and theater practitioners, relayed in a modern, accessible style with a substantial editorial framework that both informs and directs the reader where to turn for more. Our annotations help readers trace not only Lessing’s dramatic theory, but also his performance theory, his references to ancient and contemporary theater practice, international writings of the day on acting and aesthetics, and Lessing’s own ongoing inquiries into social, philosophical, and theological problems.

The challenges presented by such an ambitious endeavor are many. The translation choices we make in bringing an eighteenth-century

²Zimmern was aware of these omissions. In her 1878 “Memoir” she leaves what appears to be a clue as to why she would expurgate the *Dramaturgy* twelve years later:

Lessing analysed the plays and their performance; he pointed out not only where, but why actors had erred; his sure perception and accurate knowledge of stage routine made him an invaluable guide to the performers. His criticisms, had they been continued, would have laid the basis of a science of histrionics, but unhappily for the world, the wretched vanity of the artistes, some of whom he had ventured gently to condemn, caused him to desist from this portion of his criticism.

It is true that Lessing cuts off his strict performance analysis after Essay 25 because not every actor in the troupe considered him an “invaluable guide.” For the full essay, see Zimmern, Helen. *The Dramatic Works of G. E. Lessing*. Trinity College: Cambridge, 1878. Project Gutenberg. 15 Aug. 2010. Web. 20 Dec. 2013.

German writer to a twenty-first-century Anglophone audience might be controversial, requiring review and perhaps debate, for they are not merely lexical and syntactic, but philosophical as well. We feel that a translation that truly captures the *Hamburg Dramaturgy* should be one that strives to mimic Lessing not only in his erudition, vibrancy, and immediacy, but also in his delight in dialectics, human exchange, and even controversy, for Lessing loved arguing with his friends and enemies alike.

To that end, inspired by Lessing’s choice of a serial publication format for his gazette, and in an attempt to make our work as relevant as possible to the age of digital research, we have developed an approach that will enable a web-based peer review of our work. Each translated essay, when finalized, is posted online along with its editorial notes. Viewers are able to read the text as we produce it, and the platform for the site (generated by MediaCommons) provides a variety of interactive tools, including rollover footnotes and a comments section, enabling readers to append questions and ideas to specific paragraphs.³ We invite the world to participate; Lessing scholars and Germanists, theater historians and performance theorists, dramaturgs and directors, and even those with only a passing interest are encouraged to weigh in. As part of our editorial process, we read each comment and respond carefully; any corrections that we decide are warranted will appear in the final print version of the project. We envision that the site will operate as a tremendous resource for teachers, other researchers, and anyone else who wants to know more about this remarkable work of Lessing’s.

When the translation and editing have been completed, Routledge Press will release a print edition of our text which will include additional essays by our team that locate the *Hamburg Dramaturgy* within some of the broader discourses it encompasses. The first essay, by Wendy Arons, will outline the history of the text and discuss the relationship between Lessing’s *Hamburg Dramaturgy* and the particular conditions of the emerging theater in eighteenth-century Germany. It will include a history of the Hamburg National Theater enterprise; an overview of the changes occurring in the German theater during the time; an introduction to the major personages discussed by Lessing in the text; and a section describing the text’s provenance, its original and subsequent publications, the history of its translation into English, and the methodology and aims of the new translation.

The second essay, by Natalya Baldyga, will illuminate how Lessing’s acting theory intersects with theoretical discussions of performance in eighteenth-century Europe. Baldyga’s essay will contextualize the *Hamburg Dramaturgy* not only within Lessing’s own writing about acting and performance, but also within the larger international eighteenth-century debates about acting techniques, the generation of emotion, and its potential for moral reform and the building of community. Understanding Lessing’s place within these debates will allow the reader of the *Hamburg Dramaturgy* to better situate Lessing’s performance reviews and acting theory within a larger European conversation on the function and purpose of acting.

The third essay, by Michael Chemers, will examine the impact of the *Hamburg Dramaturgy* on the establishment of the “dramaturg” as a staff position in the modern theater. Lessing’s insistence that the theater be a tool for individual and social enlightenment led to the establish-

³<http://mcpress.media-commons.org/hamburg/>

ment of a specialized in-house dramatic critic who could reflect upon the process and outcome of a theater's work for the benefit of audiences and companies alike. As some theater in Europe grew increasingly committed to Enlightenment ideals, certain playwrights and literary scholars devoted themselves more to this specialization, until the dramaturg became in many parts of the world an indispensable member of the artistic team. This final essay will chart the international development of the dramaturg up to the present day, including important figures from Europe, Africa, Asia, and North and South America.

In addition to these introductory essays, the print volume will provide a short critical biography of Lessing; an appendix with a chronology of productions at the Hamburg National Theater; and a bibliography of Lessing's work and of pertinent secondary scholarship on the *Hamburg Dramaturgy*. Our new, complete, fully annotated English translation will remove the major obstacle—the language barrier—that has kept English-speaking scholars and students from experiencing the detail, humor, and insight that Lessing brought to the task of theater criticism, and will allow them to investigate the full depth and breadth of Lessing's critical and philosophical thinking in the *Hamburg Dramaturgy*.

The project has been supported generously by grants from the American Society for Theatre Research, editing and translation support from Routledge Press UK, and, most significantly, by a Scholarly Editions and Translations Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Forward-thinking members of the scholarly community, including Routledge's editorial board and the team at MediaCommons, have also supported the project by collaborating with us on the development of our online publishing process. We anticipate the completed translation will be fully published online by the end of 2016, with the print version to appear in 2017.

We now appeal to the dramaturgs of the English-speaking world to join us in this process of Lessing-style dialectic, a process that is really a voyage of discovery, and to continue the discourse about this important figure in our shared professional history.

Visit <http://mcpres.media-commons.org/hamburg/>