

Summer 2008

## Review: The Newsletter and Journal of Dramaturgy, volume 18, issue 2

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# Review

The Newsletter and  
Journal of Dramaturgy

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**Volume 18, Issue 2**  
**Summer 2008**

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## RECONSIDERING BORDERS

In the Spring of 2003, in advance of the Chicago LMDA conference, I wrote about borders. I can't recall what started my thinking on the subject, but I really haven't stopped since. Now, I've survived the organization of an annual conference of my own, one that was given the title and theme “Crossing Borders.” Belatedly, I've re-read that editorial. Here's a passage that seems to aptly summarize some of the ideas I had in mind:

If there is a language of limitation that applies to our work it seems to stem more from social, personal, institutional, and economic boundaries — the divisions that separate individuals and communities from each other. The table that anchors a dramaturg in a corner of the rehearsal room. The street that separates an affluent college campus from the working-class neighborhood that abuts it. The discomfort that [...] kids feel, bussed [from their public school] to a multi-million dollar arts center. The proscenium arch. Niagara Falls. All of us in some way mark the borders of our experience, not from “some geographical or moral terra firma,” as Diana Taylor has put it, but from the shifting ground of someone who crosses those borders daily (179).<sup>1</sup>



**LITERARY MANAGERS  
& DRAMATURGS  
OF THE AMERICAS**

Of course, living in San Diego as I do, a discussion of the US-Mexico border is obvious and necessary; but as our colleague Silvia Peláez pointed out in her presentation on Saturday June 28, language can be as much a border as any line on a map.

I recently visited Montréal, where this complication of bordering was made abundantly clear. Though many people spoke both English and French with facility, almost no one who I met wanted to speak “Franglish” with me. Broken French is the best that I can muster, but in Paris most people were content to play along. In Montréal, any time I changed languages, I was immediately asked, with great emphasis, “English or French?” I suppose the issue was partly one of courtesy: no one wanted to accidentally speak English to a Francophone. But the persistent maintenance of a strict division — so different from my experience of the fluid use of Spanglish here at the SD-TJ border — suggested an investment in preserving an us-and-them distinction through language, in the absence of a strict geographical border.

I’m grateful to everyone who joined the conference in San Diego, where we began to consider and work through several boundaries and borders. Language and translation have become an abiding concern of the Dramaturgy Focus Group of the Association for Theatre in Higher Education, and I’m pleased to see that interest cross over into LMDA as well.

And I am especially excited about the translation discussion begun in this issue of *Review*: this issue includes selected scenes from the new German play *The Ballad of the Pine Tree Killer*, by Rebekka Kricheldorf. These selections, and indeed the full play, are translated by LMDA member Neil Blackadder. Neil is interviewed by Beth Gallagher, who asks him about his recent translation work,

especially the London production of Neil’s translation of *Sexual Neuroses of Our Parents*. Neil’s translation of this latter play will have its US premiere presented in New York City by Electric Pear Productions in November 2008.

I gratefully acknowledge the support and vision of Jutta Brendemühl, Project Manager for Theatre and Literature at the Goethe Institute in Toronto. Brian Quirt provided the connection, Jutta handled planning and permissions, and her staff provided a beautiful layout of a section featuring this fascinating, funny, challenging play, *The Ballad of the Pine Tree Killer*. The play is introduced by dramaturg Jürgen Popig. If you’d like to read more of the play, you have options: the Goethe Institute has an easy process for dramaturgs to obtain texts and rights information about plays through the link to their online resource: [www.goethe.de/theatrelibrary](http://www.goethe.de/theatrelibrary); you can also check out Adam Versenyi’s e-journal *The Mercurian* (which specializes in translation), in which the full script was published in March.

Expect lots more coverage of the San Diego conference in the next issue. As a souvenir, the photo below shows three of the featured speakers on the Theatre at the Border panel. In the meantime, enjoy these echoes of our conversations there. And start **GREENING YOUR THEATRE**, with tips and inspiration by Jackie Goldfinger!

Finally, don’t miss the latest juried article from ATHE’s Dramaturgy Focus Group Debut Panel: Dennis Schebetta discusses his work on an exciting, thought-provoking devised theatre adaptation of *Othello*.

D.J. Hopkins  
Istanbul

1. The quote is from Taylor’s essay “Border Watching.” *The Ends of Performance*. Ed. Peggy Phelan and Jill Lane. New York: New York UP, 1998. 178 – 185.



Three of the participants in the Theatre at the Border panel discussion, at the 2008 LMDA Conference in San Diego: Silvia Peláez, Harley Erdman, and Daniel Serrano.

Photo: Cindy SoRelle

## Review

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*Inquiries from prospective contributors are welcome. All inquiries should be directed to D.J. Hopkins: [dhopkins@mail.sdsu.edu](mailto:dhopkins@mail.sdsu.edu). Review gratefully acknowledges the support of the School of Theatre, Television, and Film and the College of Professional Studies and Fine Arts at San Diego State University.*

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## Play-in-Print

# Contemporary German Drama in North America

An initiative by the Goethe-Institut Toronto and the LMDA

## Rebekka Kricheldorf's *The Ballad of the Pine Tree Killer:* A generational battleground

*The Goethe-Institut Toronto and the LMDA have teamed up again to open the curtain onto the vibrant European theater scene. We are presenting excerpts from young, up-and-coming German playwright Rebekka Kricheldorf's tragicomedy, introduced and contextualised by Kricheldorf expert Jürgen Popig, but read for yourself...*

### The Play

Jan Mao is the victim of anti-authoritarian upbringing and in search of limits. In doing so he stages himself as a modern Don Juan and squanders his father's money. Father Franz, formerly an idealistic hippie, has become the head of a flourishing advertising agency and wants his son to succeed him. But Jan refuses (also because he doesn't have the chops). He only gets through the day with the help of his unemployed but enormously overqualified friend Rudolf. Elvira, formerly Franz's companion and now his best client, is supposed to put Jan on the right path, but is stressed out already by her daughter Anna. And



then there is Tine, who sells herself and cell phone contracts for cash.

Communication between the generations seems next to impossible, the characters encounter one another as strangers armoured in irony. The main influence on all of them is the myth of Don Juan, but not even the admonishing, serenading ghost of Franz (by now dead) can save his son and a flock of flamingos from a tragic(-comic) ending.

“Kricheldorf’s best play yet: subtly elegant and pointed, she mixes the myth of Don Juan with a screwball comedy about generational and class conflict.”

—*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*

# The Ballad of the Pine Tree Killer

or: “Go ahead.  
We’ll wait. It’ll be fine.”

“Personally, I was never actively involved in the incineration of a Christmas tree, and I was not brought up by those determinedly permissive parents of the sixties. But I did have a childhood friend who was. In retrospect, he has – rather inadvertently – become an object of study.” — Rebekka Kricheldorf



*The Ballad of the Pine Tree Killer* has its roots in the 2003-2004 writers’ workshop “Poets into the Theater”, held at the Stuttgart State Theater. A number of young, contemporary German playwrights were asked to write a piece for the theater. Among them was Rebekka Kricheldorf. At the time, I was working as dramaturg for the Stuttgart Theater and was full of enthusiasm for Kricheldorf’s first play, *Princess Nicoletta*, which had been premiered at the Gießen Municipal Theater. In record time, Rebekka handed in a synopsis of *The Ballad of the Pine Tree Killer* – a witty, comical piece involving three generations facing off: the generation ‘68’ of hippie parents confronts their GenX children as well as their millennial grandchildren—all of this set against the Don Juan legend.

In the play, the ‘68ers’ have long betrayed their ideals and comfortably arranged themselves with the very society they once scorned. But their permissive parenting style has left their children ill-prepared for life. They have a clueless, infantile attitude and an odd aversion to taking responsibility—character traits that are personified in the play’s protagonist, Jan Mao. The grandchildren, in turn, display a strange combination of conservatism, vigour and sense of purpose. This completely mad-cap mix had us instantly convinced that this was a play we wanted to premiere! The project moved forward quickly from that point on. The premiere was scheduled for May 2004, which would give Rebekka

enough time to finish writing the manuscript. We needed the time because the ending was still missing, and I felt that the roles of the three women were not sufficiently developed. Rebekka, however, gave us nothing. She was happy to answer questions and provide ideas for the play but did not finish writing it.

When we were scheduled to test the stage props, we did not even have a set because the designer refused to work on an unfinished play. What would later become the charming allure of this Stuttgart production—an empty stage and the improvised use of props—had its origins in our dire predicament. Rebekka wrote of this peculiar period: “Right from the beginning, there was a certain calmness about the whole project: Nobody rushed, no one became insistent, or pressed for more text. Go ahead. We’ll wait. It’ll be fine. Four weeks to the start of rehearsals and the play is not finished? No reason to become hysterical. Go ahead. We’ll wait. It’ll be fine. I felt totally serene about it. And that’s how I sat through the rehearsals. The entire set had to be thrown out? Go ahead. I’ll wait. It’ll be fine. —and it was!”

As it turned out, it really was fine.

When the writing was finally done, the text was felt to be excellent. The ending was truly climactic with the clash of the generations and the Don Juan legend merging beautifully: Jan Mao and Rudolf really did become Don Juan and Leporello. Even the ghost appears in the form of Franz, the late father. Instead of being ushered to hell, though, Jan Mao is declared legally incapable of managing his own affairs and a guardian is appointed for him. A descent into hell of sorts.

Rebekka kept visiting us during the rehearsals, and the premiere production was the result of a close collaboration between her and director Erich Sidler. His staging of the play was an amazing journey into the imagination. On an empty stage, and only using chalk marks, each single scene and location of the play was conceived. All of the actors were always on stage. Everything happened as if improvised. The text was more often questioned than acted out. It was an intelligent and entertaining piece of contemporary theater with six interesting roles. The performance was witty and fast-paced. It turned out to be one of the most successful plays of the season for the Stuttgart Theater. *The Ballad* was invited to be performed at the Mülheim Theater Festival in 2005, and critics of the “Theater Heute” magazine voted it Best Play of the Year. Other reviewers felt Kricheldorf had written her best play to date. The audience loved *The Ballad*, giving it a two-year run. But there is more. In 2007, I organized a Festival of Second Runs for

seven plays at the Osnabrück Theater, where I had become head dramaturg: *The Ballad of the Pine Tree Killer* was one of them.

In Stuttgart, we had used a small 100-seat studio stage. Now, in Osnabrück, we wanted to perform it on the main stage with 660 seats, which meant adapting both the mise-en-scène of the play as well as the style of the actors. Instead of intimate improvisation, we had to go for large stage sets, surprising transformations and very physical and almost choreographed acting. In Stuttgart, we had put on the entire play. For the Osnabrück production, we called Rebekka and decided to drop entire sections. As I had produced both stagings, I wondered: Would the magnified and somewhat coarser Osnabrück production harm the play? The answer was: No. Rebekka was happy and surprised how well her play worked on a big stage. Most reviews were full of praise. The audience loved it. And the Osnabrück Theater was invited to Bulgaria’s Danube Festival.

In an interview, Rebekka was asked: “Why did you call the play a ‘ballad’?” Her response: “First, the language is more lyrical than everyday speech and the characters tend to describe their circumstances very explicitly. I also wanted to have the protagonist’s attempt to return to traditional values reflected in the title. Have I said enough?”

Not for me, really. I continue to work with Rebekka Kricheldorf at the Osnabrück Theater. She is writing another play. The plot? I don’t really know. But I am not worried. I am confident: Go ahead. We’ll wait. It’ll be fine.

JÜRGEN POPIG was born in 1961 in Germany. He has worked as a dramaturg in Singen, Freiburg, and, from 1993 to 2005, at the Stuttgart State Theater. Jürgen Popig is now head dramaturg at Osnabrück Theater.

## About the Playwright



Rebekka Kricheldorf was born in Freiburg in southern Germany in 1974. She studied Romance languages at Humboldt University Berlin and Stage Writing at the Berlin Academy of Arts.

Awards for her work include the Publisher’s Award, the

Audience Award at the Heidelberg New Play Festival, the prestigious Kleist and Schiller Awards.

In 2004 Staatstheater Stuttgart premiered *Die Ballade vom Nadelbaumkiller*. The production was invited to the Mülheim Theater Festival and to the Heidelberg New Play Festival, Germany’s best-in-show festivals, and will tour to Bulgaria soon.

# THE BALLAD OF THE PINE TREE KILLER

[Die Ballade vom  
Nadelbaumkiller]

By Rebekka Kricheldorf

## Translated from the German by Neil

**Blackadder.** Neil Blackadder translates drama and prose from German and French. Rebekka Kricheldorf's *The Ballad of the Pine Tree Killer* was presented in a staged reading in 2006 at the German Theater Abroad New York City. In February 2008, Neil directed his translation of Kricheldorf's *Rosa and Blanca* at Knox College, where he teaches theater.

This translation was originally commissioned by German Theater Abroad and has been supported by the Goethe-Institut.

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## CHARACTERS

Jan	born 1970
Franz	born 1940
Rudolf	born 1975
Elvira	born 1950
Anna	born 1985
Tine	born 1980

## PROLOGUE

When I was young

ANNA

When I was young  
I think the cookies  
In the ads on TV  
Are just as big  
As the cookies on the shelf  
I'm so excited  
About the big cookies  
When I buy the cookies  
And take them out of the packet  
I'm disappointed  
And I cry

FRANZ

When I was young  
I'm in love with the daughter of an old school  
general  
And I have to make it official  
By asking him for her hand  
When the general sees me  
The blood rushes to his head  
He doesn't say a word and I leave  
I have long hair  
And a dove of peace on my jacket  
What the general doesn't yet know  
His daughter's pregnant

TINE

When I was young  
I have an identity crisis  
I'm not sure of myself  
So I take a piece of paper  
And write a list  
Of all my good qualities  
Then I read it out loud to myself and record it  
On cassette  
And every morning I play the cassette

RUDOLF

When I was young  
I hate the marketplace  
I feel like I'm being put under pressure  
By the yelling of the vegetable women  
Going on about how great their beans are  
Really loudly and relentlessly  
I prefer to go  
To the discreet quiet of the supermarket  
Where the merchandise calmly sits there  
And silently lets itself be picked out by me

ELVIRA

When I was young  
In the black and white of the new TV set  
There are pretty women  
Demonstrating vacuum cleaners  
And combing children's hair  
With impeccable side parts  
I feel paralyzed  
And it takes me years afterward  
To get rid of that paralysis

JAN

When I was young  
I smash the window of a bank  
Out of protest  
The police come  
And my father  
Is also there right away  
He pulls out his camera  
And captures the moment  
Me  
Distraught and full of hatred  
In the background the shattered glass  
And at the edge  
Like in a painting  
A handful of policemen  
Only five weeks later  
I'm an advertising campaign  
The city's covered with posters  
With my photo  
And under it the name  
Of a bank  
And the slogan  
We're clearing the way

## 1. FATHER'S DAY 1

A picture, hung facing the wall.

RUDOLF

Your father's on the phone he says  
He wrote you a text message in which  
He let you know about a letter which  
Contains the date he sent the email from which  
You can find out exactly when you'll receive the  
telegram that  
Tells you what day he'll arrive

Enter Franz

There  
It's him  
Can you

The sound of doors slamming

Show him in  
Pleasant flight

FRANZ

You might as well ask me  
Whether I had a pleasant time breathing  
Whether I had a pleasant time gasping for air  
That's how often I fly  
And for me flying  
Just like breathing  
Has nothing to do with  
Pleasant

RUDOLF

Are you thirsty  
Water OJ Coke coffee  
Wine champagne beer schnaps

FRANZ

Thank you  
I could drink a coffee

What's that I'm smelling

RUDOLF  
Are you hungry  
Fries cookies soup beans  
Chips chicken fruit steak

FRANZ  
No thanks  
Are you frying a halibut  
This place smells of the sea  
I'm taken aback and disappointed  
Yes I'm put out  
That my son keeps himself from me  
And I'm sorry  
But finding you here  
Also comes as a surprise  
I thought  
You'd moved out a long time ago

RUDOLF  
And I don't live here  
I'm just here all the time

FRANZ  
What's the difference then

RUDOLF  
It's not a matter of where you are  
But of the feeling that goes along with it  
I'm here  
But I'm ready to go  
Any minute  
I've only set myself up like this  
Temporarily  
Until the right job comes along and I can settle  
down

FRANZ  
How are the studies

RUDOLF  
I finished ages ago  
But the job market  
Well you know how it is  
Every day I fill out a thousand  
Applications before breakfast  
That costs a pretty penny  
One thousand stamps  
Every day

FRANZ  
Who finances that  
Don't tell me  
I can guess  
I finance it  
My son  
His soft heart

RUDOLF  
If we're talking about the consistency of his heart  
Soft isn't necessarily how I'd put it  
We have a deal  
I do certain things  
And he pays for my stamps

FRANZ  
Certain things what things  
If one is allowed to ask

RUDOLF  
Well whatever comes up  
Cooking washing cleaning ironing  
Sewing scrubbing shopping running errands  
Filling things out dropping things off  
Answering the phone answering the door

FRANZ  
He can do all that himself  
My son can

RUDOLF  
He can't do all that himself  
Your son can't  
I understand  
That it's traditional for a father to see his  
offspring  
Through rose-tinted glasses  
But  
You must have some idea what he's like

FRANZ  
I know  
He makes heavy weather of things  
He had to be dragged through his graduation  
Like a wet rag  
And after that  
For a few years he did

Secret things  
But basically he's neither stupid  
Nor lazy

RUDOLF  
The years turned into a decade  
And those secret things  
He's still doing them  
And as with most secret things  
What's hidden behind them is  
Nothing

FRANZ  
You  
And your function  
In my son's life  
Aren't clear to me  
You don't live here  
You're not his lover  
And you're not his friend either  
So what are you anyway

RUDOLF  
I'm the last liana  
That every now and then  
Gets him out of his swampy jungle  
On to firm ground  
Without tearing

FRANZ  
You talk about him  
As if he was mentally handicapped

RUDOLF  
He's emotionally handicapped  
He needs a handicapped ID  
For his disposition  
But unfortunately there's no office  
In the country that will give him one

FRANZ  
I can't believe that  
He was brought up very freely  
And has all the best aptitudes  
There's nothing sickly about him  
You're playing his lackey

For some questionable private reason

RUDOLF  
You mustn't think  
I'm a servile person by nature  
It's the circumstances which force me into it

FRANZ  
Speaking openly man to man  
Your intentions  
Are extremely unclear to me  
You've attached yourself to him  
In order to profit from his wealth

RUDOLF  
Speaking openly back  
He's attached himself to me  
In order to profit from my work  
He goes through the world like a boy without a  
bucket  
You can't even send him to the bakery  
Instead of coming back with rolls  
He shows up with women  
Even if you give him a piece of paper with  
perfectly legible writing  
Saying in big letters  
A dozen rolls  
Not  
A dozen women

FRANZ  
I'll talk about that  
With him in person

RUDOLF  
Yes well  
It would seem that paternal love  
Has not won a special place  
In his soul  
Otherwise he'd be here

FRANZ  
Where is he

RUDOLF  
Yes well  
Out

FRANZ  
Today  
When I told him I was coming



RUDOLF

Yes well  
To be precise he fled  
From you  
He guesses  
Why you came

FRANZ

He's acting as if I came to force him into a  
marriage  
Or a work camp  
But all I want is to  
Entrust to him a flourishing firm  
That anyone else would be only too glad to take  
What's he doing all this time  
Out there  
In the streets

RUDOLF

He's looking for some resistance

FRANZ

That's not a full-time job

RUDOLF

It is for him  
In all the years we've known each other  
I've enrolled in four different degree programs  
And completed all of them  
While your son  
Yes well you know him yourself

FRANZ

I don't understand  
He ought to be grateful  
For the times he's living in  
And choose a bull that suits him  
And take it by the horns  
Back in our day  
We were paralyzed  
And had trouble moving  
They wanted to chisel us  
Like statues

Or cut us out

According to the beloved fifties pattern  
Stop signs and warning signs  
Were our lighthouses  
We kept on banging our heads  
Against obstacles until they were bloody  
And there were so many stones  
Lying in our way  
That in the end  
They made up the route  
Which by the way was so straight and narrow  
That anyone whose feet had grown too big  
Automatically strayed from it  
Today  
So much is possible  
Perhaps even anything

RUDOLF

If anything's possible today  
How come I'm here  
And don't have a job

FRANZ

Your own fault you daredevil you  
With the right get-up-and-go  
You'll take off like a rocket  
And zoom up to any heights you can imagine  
Wherever you like

RUDOLF

Can you prove that theory  
With a living example  
If anything was possible  
Then the son of a fishmonger could  
Climb up to the board of directors  
No problem  
Provided he had the skills  
That I  
As you'll see from my papers  
Definitely do have  
FRANZ  
So you want to climb up high  
And higher still  
In business  
Noone could call you immodest

RUDOLF

That's the reaction I expected  
The miller can become a model  
The plumber can become a pop star  
The blacksmith can become an action hero  
Everything is possible  
In the new world that you so selflessly  
Won through fighting in the streets  
Only the fishmonger  
Won't join the board of directors  
Yes well I suppose I'd have been better off  
Investing my time in singing lessons  
Instead of finishing four degrees  
Cum laude

FRANZ

Now don't start with  
The whole classic story  
Of the genius born in the straw hut  
Who at twelve dies of hunger undiscovered

RUDOLF

Very funny  
I'm going to die laughing  
So your social revolution  
Led to  
Scorn for the masses  
You sure sound harsh  
For an ex-communard

FRANZ

What do you think we fought for  
For you  
A land of milk and honey  
Look around you  
Everything became friendlier  
Down to the lowest level  
I run my business humanely  
My employees receive birthday presents  
They're treated without sex discrimination  
And they have a vote

RUDOLF

How nice  
But it does sound

Forgive me

Measured by the goals that you once had  
A bit toothless

FRANZ

I grant myself the right  
To age with dignity  
And to exchange the excesses of yesterday  
For the smarts of today  
Now I put the long march  
Ahead of the short stone's throw

RUDOLF

Well of course you never had to march much  
To keep your business  
Only over a small hill  
The hill of your father's grave

FRANZ

You're reproaching me for the state of the world  
Just because I couldn't change it  
In a big way  
And because I've nevertheless  
Made my place in it  
And find it quite cosy  
You think  
I owe you something  
Alright well let's hear it

RUDOLF

I consider myself  
Excuse the arrogance  
Of above-average talent  
And yet I cannot find  
A career track  
Corresponding with my qualifications  
That's due to the scent of something unfamiliar  
They won't let me in  
Into the shrine of German business  
A form of discrimination  
That you presumably once  
Planned to eliminate from the world

FRANZ

I could point to  
You yourself

As an example

In order to prove  
How wrong you've got it  
But in any case I don't know  
Of how much help I can be  
I run an advertising agency

RUDOLF

What I lack is the necessary contacts

FRANZ

Contacts  
Contacts  
I have a bag full of contacts

RUDOLF  
Then open it for me  
As I know from your son  
For years you've had  
A business relationship with Donna Elvira

FRANZ  
Elvira  
We've been advertising her products for years  
Elvira  
The timing is good  
Elvira  
She's about to give a small reception  
Which I want to use as a pretext  
For introducing my son to her  
Come with us  
While I find you  
Extremely  
Dislikeable  
I owe this to my biography

RUDOLF  
Stupid  
You'd have to be stupid  
To commit yourself to an idea  
But still  
Thank you

FRANZ  
He still isn't coming  
What can he be doing

Where can he be

RUDOLF  
He's unlikely to be back  
Until after it gets dark out  
If you are still hoping to see him  
You're welcome to wait here  
And wait  
And wait

### 3. PARENTS' COMPLAINT

Franz sitting with a cup of coffee. Rudolf stands next to him in servant posture with a coffee pot in his hand.

FRANZ  
Should have procreated more  
Back then  
Just one child  
What a risk  
I didn't realize  
It can die or be a failure  
Such thoughts never occurred to me  
Back then  
Now a good substitute  
Would be just the thing  
The kind you can bring in off the bench  
Just whistle and there he'd stand  
He'd keep on carrying the torch without stumbling  
He'd throw himself into the current and swim  
Not flawless

But tender  
He holds up the empty cup. Rudolf pours more coffee.  
All the stuff that we  
Showered on you  
Leather shoes  
Music lessons  
Growing up without worries  
Anything good that I didn't have you had it  
Anything bad that I had you didn't have  
So in keeping with the ideas of the time  
We liberated you from the reign of terror of rules  
In the belief that he would grow up  
Into a valuable person  
A mature citizen  
And now  
Holds up empty cup. Rudolf pours more coffee.  
You're refusing even to talk  
Conversation the basis of any process of understanding  
Conversation with the one who loves you your father  
Who means you well  
But however well he means you  
His goodness has no chance of reaching you  
Because you retreat  
Remember  
How much fun we had  
At Christmas  
We were still a team back then  
I'm your friend and always was  
And yet you wage a war against me  
The trench warfare of refusal  
I feel awful  
He holds up the empty cup. Rudolf tires to pour more coffee, but the pot is empty.  
Okay then I'll go  
Exit  
RUDOLF  
Well it was about time

### 11. THE CHILDREN OF TODAY

[...]

RUDOLF  
By the way  
Your father  
JAN  
It's wonderful how  
So many contradictory things  
Come together in him without conflict  
In peaceful coexistence

RUDOLF  
He's  
By the way

JAN  
Him and his friends with their holy red wine  
They peek out of their Tuscan villas with their sheep's faces  
And take themselves for wolves

RUDOLF  
By the way  
He's here

JAN  
Where

RUDOLF  
Underneath the plant

FRANZ  
Son

JAN  
Get lost

FRANZ  
Talk to me  
We have to move to Switzerland  
To avoid the inheritance tax  
We have to introduce you to all sorts of people  
We have to work you in  
We have to retrain you  
We have to dress you up

JAN  
Where does the sudden hurry come from  
And this sudden we have to  
Did I used to have to do anything

FRANZ  
It's just a verb

JAN  
Go away

RUDOLF  
Please keep in mind  
He often gets like this  
It passes

FRANZ  
The day has come  
When you too  
Have to lend a hand

JAN  
How can I  
I'm really weak  
Can't you see that  
I'm really weak  
Here  
Points to his head  
Here  
Points to his arms  
And here  
Oh God I'm so weak  
I can hardly stand up any longer  
Oh how weak I am  
Mimes fainting  
Rudolf catches him

RUDOLF  
There you see  
He can't any longer

JAN  
He can't any longer

FRANZ  
What tired you out so much  
What wore you out so much  
You're still all fresh  
Full of youthful vitality

JAN  
What do you mean youthful  
We're 35  
Old  
Tired  
Men

FRANZ  
But the possibilities  
The ways the means the freedom  
The  
Yes  
I say it with envy and enthusiasm  
Opportunities for self-development

JAN  
We have no idea which way to go  
We know nothing whatsoever  
The more we read  
The more we learn  
The more we experience  
The less we know  
In other words we know nothing at all

FRANZ  
Rudolf I beg of you  
You are an intelligent young man  
Come on say something  
Exercise your authority

RUDOLF  
I'm sorry  
I can be bought  
From head to toe  
With skin and hair  
Even my opinion can be bought  
Your son bought it  
With your money  
I am as it were in the public sphere  
Always of the same opinion as him  
It's true that sometimes  
I give him a piece of my mind  
But only when it's just the two of us

JAN  
Once  
Someone  
Said to me  
You  
You can't forgive God  
For having screwed up Creation  
Could that be a motive

FRANZ  
Since when are you religious

RUDOLF  
Please keep in mind  
He often gets like this  
It passes  
If you look carefully  
It's like an apple  
Which though it's turning its rotten side toward  
the stem  
Nevertheless isn't far away from it  
Idealism is hereditary  
That's why I'm so free of it

JAN  
To Rudolf  
How come you've never rescued me  
How come you've never torn me away from  
death  
By say carrying me out of a burning house  
Putting yourself in front of me during a hail of  
bullets  
Building me a drug treatment clinic  
Or donating your kidneys  
Then we could talk about friendship

RUDOLF  
I may temporarily be servile because I have no  
choice  
But I'm not out of my mind

JAN  
It's always just about the money  
Oh God how petty

RUDOLF  
It's always the wealthy  
Who complain  
That it's always about the money

FRANZ  
What we have here is the problematization  
Of the lack of a problem  
I'm stuck in the middle  
Of an effort to create a problem

JAN  
How can anyone have gone to the dogs as much  
As you have

He turns the picture around. It shows Franz as a  
hippie.  
This guy  
Wouldn't have even shaken hands  
With this guy

FRANZ  
Forgive me for having changed  
Would you like to see a photo of you  
From ten years ago  
I'm not confronting you with yourself  
In an early stage  
You're not playing fair

JAN  
But in that early stage I sat there peacefully  
Completely given over to myself in harmless  
autism

Whereas you fancied yourself a trendsetter  
And doctored around on others

FRANZ  
Every time I come up with an innovation  
You hit me over the head with it  
The whole time you're acting wounded  
Just because people were nice to you  
During your childhood and left you alone  
Get involved play your part  
It would be best if you could start right away  
With our little family firm

JAN  
This belief  
That not working makes you sick  
It's ludicrous  
Why hoist the flag of action  
There's hardly any work in any case  
So why should someone like me  
Tire myself out with tiring activity  
That will make my short life shorter still  
I want a bed made of gold  
I want curtains made of China silk  
I want chandeliers made of crystal  
I want  
Genuine white oxen  
Grazing outside my window

FRANZ  
What shall I do  
I stand here powerless  
Before my own product  
While it boils over uncontrollably  
Like overheated milk

JAN  
I don't ever want to work  
I only want friends  
Who never work  
So that they have enough time  
For thinking  
And so that conversation with them  
Is more interesting  
I don't want to hear tedious stories  
About tedious workdays  
Never anything but tedious reports  
I want friends  
Who are rich enough  
To afford a wet nurse  
So that they don't always  
Drag their children with them to my place  
And don't always talk about nothing but kids  
Tedious accounts  
Of tedious days  
And tedious children  
I mean really do they think  
That gives anyone pleasure  
I want friends  
Who are better dressed  
Who spent  
At least three hours  
In their dressing-room  
Which of course they have  
Before they visit me  
I want friends

Who waste days  
What am I saying weeks  
What am I saying months  
Seducing a woman  
And then give me  
A detailed report  
And no friends  
Who look in the personals  
Friends  
Who look in the personals  
You just have to imagine  
What I suffer

RUDOLF  
Please keep in mind  
He often gets like this  
It passes

FRANZ  
So what exactly do you want

JAN  
I want perfect friends

FRANZ  
Perfect  
That doesn't exist

JAN  
Why  
Why  
Why not

RUDOLF  
They say  
He can't forgive God  
For having screwed up Creation

FRANZ  
Bullshit

RUDOLF  
I thought that  
You as a revolutionary  
Would speak in different terms

JAN  
I want a lover  
Who'll speak formally to me

FRANZ  
Oh you know  
There was a time

JAN  
I want a horse

RUDOLF  
In a Christian context  
It would be heresy  
To talk of Creation having been screwed up  
Though if that doesn't apply then all we have  
Is a simple pose of cultural pessimism

FRANZ  
In any case the pose seems to me to

Outstrip the natural attitude  
As if all that was left was the wrapping

JAN  
I want 23 Indian women  
Of 23 different ages  
Who can do 23 different tricks

RUDOLF  
Better to be only wrapping  
Than to be confronted with the horror  
Of one's own lack of self

JAN  
I want a flock of flamingoes

FRANZ  
You're probably right there  
When one's self-image dissolves  
It's a troubling alarm signal  
As if a secret devil  
Had dipped all the mirrors in hydrochloric acid

JAN  
I want a hall of marble

RUDOLF  
But still this issue seems to me like  
The luxury cruise-ship  
On which a worn-out elite  
Dance their last steps  
Look at me  
I've not been afraid to use the mirror  
And yet still I suffer

JAN  
I want a space ship  
For my trips to the moon

FRANZ  
You came onto the floor with  
An imaginary wooden leg  
That only you can see  
Free yourself from this fata morgana

RUDOLF  
All my bad behavior  
Results from my bad upbringing

JAN  
I want a saffron plantation

FRANZ  
Don't say bad  
Say poor

JAN  
I want an absolute love  
That does not shun death

RUDOLF  
He wants an absolute love  
That does not shun death

FRANZ  
That surprises me

RUDOLF  
I'm surprised by it now too

FRANZ  
Who is this stranger  
This unpredictable person

RUDOLF  
That's Jan  
Your son

FRANZ  
So that's my son

RUDOLF  
I know him really well  
I'm very good at guessing what's going on with  
him  
But there always remains in him  
An unpredictable blank spot  
That scares me

JAN  
An era  
Which acts as if  
It offers everything  
But in reality  
Offers nothing at all  
What can I do with this shit  
Freedom  
Is the most overrated good  
Stupid human rights  
Idiotic right of assembly  
Thick-skulled legalized drugs  
Dim-witted right to vote  
Ass-fucking therapy centers  
For child abusers  
Since they did away with the guillotine  
It's been downhill all the way

FRANZ  
He certainly didn't  
Take up my political views

RUDOLF  
Those aren't views  
They're cries for help  
From an existence that is dissolving

FRANZ  
Oh really  
Well that makes me feel better

JAN  
The coarsening of the country's youth  
Can no longer be treated with therapy  
What kind of era is it  
That sends its worse murderers  
To Siberia accompanied by with social workers  
Where it puts them on horseback  
I demand show trials on Sundays  
Let the family of the victim  
Throw the first stone

FRANZ  
Well that's certainly something one could talk  
about

JAN  
The only way to save our culture  
Is the death penalty

FRANZ  
Is he saying this  
Against me  
Or is he saying it  
Because he always says it

RUDOLF  
He says a lot  
But he's harmless  
He couldn't even execute  
A cockroach

JAN  
I heard that and you should know  
You're wrong

FRANZ  
Is he in a state now  
Where one could ask him for something

RUDOLF  
Try it

JAN  
Why is it that  
When they rank us by subjective feeling of  
happiness  
We come number 23  
And number 1  
Is Bangladesh

FRANZ  
Don't shout like that

RUDOLF  
He often shouts  
It'll pass

JAN  
Bangladesh  
Can you imagine  
Bangladesh

FRANZ  
Son  
There's going to be a reception  
At an old friend's place  
Donna Elvira  
A few important people are coming  
I thought  
When you've got a taste of the professional world  
Maybe you'll get hooked

JAN  
Every wall of posters  
In this country  
Promises me  
That I can have  
And be anything

FRANZ  
Will you come

RUDOLF  
He didn't hear you

FRANZ  
Son  
The reception  
At Donna Elvira's  
My old girlfriend

JAN  
Is she good-looking

RUDOLF  
He's asking  
If she's good-looking  
Just say yes

FRANZ  
I'll just say yes

RUDOLF  
He says yes

JAN  
He says yes  
I say yes

RUDOLF  
He says yes



## Goethe-Institut Theater

The Goethe-Institut presents the latest arts and ideas to come from Germany. Visit the web site of your local Goethe-Institut to find out more about our programs, events and resources:

[www.goethe.de/canada](http://www.goethe.de/canada)

[www.goethe.de/usa](http://www.goethe.de/usa)

[www.goethe.de/mexico](http://www.goethe.de/mexico)

The Goethe-Institut theater web portal offers up-to-date news on the current debates in German theater, dossiers on directors, new plays in translation, children's theater, scholarships and more:

[www.goethe.de/theatre](http://www.goethe.de/theatre)

In Canada, contact us any time with your ideas & projects related to Germany & German culture:

**Director: Dr. Arpad A. Sölter**

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**www.goethe.de/toronto**

- The Goethe-Institut collaborates with other major players such as the Stratford Festival or the International Theater Institute to initiate ground-breaking work.
- The Goethe-Institut offers audiences artistically fresh experiences through cutting-edge live performances.
- The Goethe-Institut is a trend spotter in the German and North American theater scenes and provides information about the latest happenings on international stages.

## What people in the community are saying about the Goethe-Institut

The presence of the Goethe-Institut in the cultural life in Canada is indispensable. By partnering with arts organizations and artists on a wide range of projects and bringing German arts practitioners, they have become an integral part of the Canadian cultural tapestry. The European perspective we discover through the engagement of the Goethe-Institut contributes to an on-going and engaging exchange of ideas on contemporary drama and arts in general. Only through such long-term partnerships can we push the global cultural boundaries and mutually enrich our respective cultures.

**Amela Simic, Executive Director, Playwrights Guild of Canada**

The Goethe-Institut Toronto is the inside connection into the German arts, providing experienced knowledge on artists and suggestions on who to contact for funding possibilities and how to make the project happen.

**Lynanne Sparrow, Producer, The Grand, Calgary**

Toronto's Goethe-Institut has been a valuable part of my own development as a theater artist in that they have opened windows to other theatrical styles, to other kinds of writing, and ways of theater making. This has had a profound impact on my own company's work. I'm a big fan!

**Ross Manson, Artistic Director, Volcano Theater Toronto**

The Goethe-Institut has been a great ally of theater by exposing artists and audiences to work from Germany that would otherwise be unseen in this country. The opportunity to meet German theater artists is invaluable and the Institut's efforts to bring our work to the attention of our contemporaries there has opened doors and launched new collaborations.

**Brian Quirt, President, Literary Managers & Dramaturgs of the Americas**

The Goethe, through its professional development series, brings skilled and engaging German voices to our community. These mutual exchanges deepen our artistic practice and provide opportunities for international conversation around art-making and its impact.

**Michael Trent, Artistic Director, Dancemakers Toronto**

My scholarship in Berlin taught me more about German theater, language and culture—as well as more about myself—than I ever expected. I am excited to put my new tools into practice in Canada, and to examine how my understanding of theater and art has changed. One thing is for certain—I will definitely go back to Berlin!

**Ashlie Corcoran, theater and opera director, and GI-ITI Guest Artist in Berlin 2007**

Without the Goethe-Institut, we would largely only know Canadian and American theater. Artists and audiences do not have much exposure to live arts outside of North America these days. The Goethe-Institut is an important source of the German and European influences we need to keep us inspired and informed.

**John Gzowski, composer and musician**

I feel that the workshop was a smashing success. ... What a powerful, practical, precise, expansive, open, generous, supportive and intense exploration Lukas invited us to be present with.

**Participant in workshop *Text and Theater* with playwright Lukas Bärfuss (Zürich)**



- The Goethe-Institut connects experts and practitioners on both sides of the ocean to inform and inspire each other, e.g. at the Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas conferences.
- The Goethe-Institut is your gateway to Germany and Europe, such as with the international Guest Program for Young Theater Artists that offers internships at Germany's top theaters.
- The Goethe-Institut runs industry workshops and public discussions that push the limits of the discipline.
- The Goethe-Institut looks at theater from all angles and examines the intersections between the genres.
- The Goethe-Institut puts young people centre stage by presenting mind-blowing productions for children at major festivals.
- The Goethe-Institut fosters outstanding local productions relevant to the transatlantic dialogue.

**The Goethe-Institut celebrates theater!**



# “A Fundamental Resistance”

## An Interview with Neil Blackadder

*Neil Blackadder is an Associate Professor of Theatre at Knox College. He has translated five plays from German, and one from French. One of his recent translations, *The Sexual Neuroses of our Parents*, by Lukas Bärfuss, was staged at London’s Gate Theatre in 2007. In this interview, Neil speaks with Beth Gallagher about translation, and the production of translated plays in America.*



*Neil Blackadder.  
Photo provided by Neil.*

**How do you balance issues of “actability” with a desire to be “faithful” to the original?**

With difficulty, and care, and where possible, in consultation with the director (as with Carrie Cracknell for the Gate production). It seems to me that this question always presupposes that a rendering that’s “too” faithful might not be sufficiently “actable” because it might sound somewhat unnatural; but there are times, especially in the scripts I’m drawn to, where the original isn’t all that natural-sounding either. So in some cases, one could distort the original more by making it “actable”, by sort of smoothing out its rough edges. With Bärfuss’ and [Rebekka] Kricheldorf’s plays, I’ve wanted to preserve a certain stylized quality in the original. Having said all that, of course it is important that director and actors find a level of comfort with the language, and that did lead to my bringing certain lines closer to customary usage as I revised *Sexual Neuroses*.

**How do you deal with a concept or idea for which no parallel exists in the language you are translating to?**

I’m not sure this happens as much with “concepts or ideas” as it does with idioms or with cultural references and allusions. I try to find an equivalent, which sometimes works well, such as, in Kricheldorf’s *Rosa and Blanca*, turning “coffee and cake” (a longstanding German tradition) in the original into “tea” in the translation. Sometimes the closest you can come is only an approximate parallel; sometimes you have to simply accept that there’s no way to convey something in the original — though often there’s a quality that you might be able to capture in another passage.



The company of *Sexual Neuroses of Our Parents*. Photo courtesy Gate Theatre.

**Should translations be considered adaptations of an original text, or can a translation be accurate enough not to be regarded as a sort of deviation from the original?**

On some level of course, translation without some deviation is simply impossible. But I do think that many translations deserve to be designated translations rather than adaptations, and I'd include my own. I think it's to theatre's credit that we try — albeit not as consistently as we might — to distinguish between translations and adaptations.

**With a New York production of your translation of *The Sexual Neuroses of Our Parents* possible, what's your opinion of the "market" for new plays in translation in the US these days?**

I have the sense that it's improved somewhat even during the six years or so that I've been pursuing theatrical translation, though I know nothing in terms of hard numbers. There seems to be more openness to producing plays in translation, probably related in a big-picture way to the post-9/11 climate, the damage the US has done to its international standing, and the efforts within the arts community to be less insular.

**Do you think that if more plays were translated into English, then more translations would be produced, or is there a resistance to producing translations in the US? If so, why do you think that resistance exists?**

Do you mean if more plays were translated and published, would

more get produced? That's hard, because not many plays in translation — or in general — get published without having been produced. And it's hard to know just how many people are doing what I do — translating plays and trying to interest theatres in producing them. In theory, I imagine that yes, if literary managers received more translations, probably more would get produced. I think there is a fundamental resistance to producing translations in the US, based on regrettable but realistic notions about what appeals to audiences; it's similar to the sad fact that American moviegoers don't like to watch movies with subtitles. This is a broad generalization of course, but I'd say that Americans are less open to what's unfamiliar than Europeans typically are. It's hard to effect a shift in that kind of deep-seated inclination.

**What, if any, are the differences between academically trained translators and those who are bilingual as a result of being immersed in two or more languages in a non-academic setting (because of parental or other natural circumstances)? How does this effect a translation, especially with regard to implicit or sub-textual information?**

Well, I'm the former, and can't really say what it would be like to be the latter. But I do think that the notion that bilingual people have an inherent advantage is questionable; if you really have grown up speaking two languages with equal facility, you may not have the kind of external awareness of how language works necessary for effective translation. As far as sub-textual information goes, I think how much time you've spent living in the culture of the original text



is probably more important than how you acquired your aptitude in that language.

**You have said that you “have selected plays that are different enough in style or content from most drama being written in English to be striking to potential directors, but are not so embedded in a different cultural context that it would be hard for directors or audiences to relate to them.” Three follow-up questions: In your opinion, what percentage of foreign plays does this rule out for translation? Also, when, if ever, do you think directors and/or audiences will be ready for or at least open to producing and viewing these culturally embedded plays? What is holding them back?**

As far as a percentage goes, I'd be hard pressed to come up with a number even for those countries whose current playwriting I know. The kind of thing I have in mind is, for instance, German plays that deal by allusion with reunification: in their original context, it can be assumed that the implications in such work will be grasped by the audience, but they would likely not be in the US. I do think that what I'm getting at here is probably truer for some countries than others; I could imagine, for instance, a theatrical culture that for whatever reason deals mostly with psychological rather than political issues, whose plays would therefore lend themselves well to translation into other languages. I don't think that somehow a day will come when people in English-speaking countries will finally be more open to work embedded in cultures they're not familiar with. It's always about specific situations and issues.



From the Gate Theatre's production of *Sexual Neuroses of Our Parents*. Photo courtesy Gate Theatre.

**What was the hardest challenge you faced when translating the text of *Sexual Neuroses*?**

I'd say: finding equivalents for the less-than-naturalistic language of Lukas' play that didn't make my English version just sound like a clunky translation.

**What, if anything surprised you most about the production?**

I haven't had the opportunity to see other productions, but I'd never anticipated quite such a physical approach; Carrie worked very closely with a choreographer (Ben Duke) to make the transitions between scenes, and often the action within scenes, very movement-centred. I thought that worked really well, partly because it constituted a non-verbal counterpart to the script's indirect treatment of the play's themes.

**What, if anything surprised you most about the audience reaction to the play in performance?**

It's hard to generalize. I saw it several times, and, for instance, some nights the audience laughed less, others more than I'd expected. I knew that the main character Dora would be affecting, at times heartbreaking.

**Do you think this production opened doors for translations being produced in England? In America?**

I'd love to think so, but no. This was the first production under brand new artistic directors (two young women, Carrie and Natalie Abrahami) who've committed the Gate specifically to foreign plays — "London's international theatre." So I see the production of my translation more as part of their venture, and perhaps as part of a broader openness to work in translation, than as a breakthrough event in its own right.

**What benefits do translations offer a US audience that they cannot get elsewhere? Why is producing translations important today?**

Insights into how people in other cultures, including but not only artists, see the world we all share. For me, that benefit is greater if the play in translation reflects a clearly different approach both to dramaturgy and to the themes. Producing translations today is important in order to ensure that the US doesn't remain too inward-looking. It's important that American theatregoers be exposed to Suzan Lori-Parks as well as August Wilson, to Charles Mee as well as Tom Stoppard — and to Lukas Bärfuss as well as Neil LaBute.

# THE GREENING OF AMERICAN THEATRE

A Two-Part Special Feature

by **Jacqueline Goldfinger**

*When someone mentions “environmental theater” we tend to think of Fefu and Her Friends or an actor dressed as a bush for a children’s show. However, “environmental theatre” is gaining a third definition: a theatre company striving to be eco-friendly.*

*Mo`olelo Performing Arts Company based in San Diego, California established their Green Theatre Initiative in 2007. I spoke to Mo`olelo’s Artistic Director Seema Sueko about their decision to go green.*

## **JG: What inspired you to propose a Green Initiative at Mo`olelo?**

Sueko: The inspiration was seeing Al Gore’s movie *An Inconvenient Truth* and thinking about how I contribute to this problem. The theatre community creates this world for four or, if you’re lucky, six weeks then it is trashed. If you look at the paints, they’re all toxic. It’s a bad thing to be exposing the audience and the crew to, and then thinking about energy and the inefficiency of theatrical lighting.

## **How did you establish your Green Theater Initiative?**

I spoke with our Board of Trustees about greening up our practices. One of our Board Members’ wives, Preeti Gupta, is a LEEDS Accredited Professional.<sup>1</sup> We met with her and other LEED accredited architects, and no one had heard of a green theatre, so the first step was to define it. Preeti helped us create guidelines, basically the nuts and bolts, how to green our operations.<sup>2</sup> Being a small theatre company, it was looking at what we have control over, and trying to figure out what we could do.

## **Where are you in your “greening” process?**

First, we brought recycle bins into the office and theater space. Then for each purchase we have to make, we look at it through a green filter. For example, when we bought our office supplies, we really thought about what we absolutely needed and who we were buying it from. We Googled “office supplies” and found GreenLine Paper Company which provides everything from notebooks and folders made out of recycled paper to biodegradable supplies for events.<sup>3</sup> They do a great job of explaining the different types of recycled products, and then you choose what to purchase.

This was June of last year so we were gearing up to market the next

show. The graphic designer researched FSC printers so that all of our marketing materials (inks, paper) are FSC certified and printed by certified print houses.<sup>4</sup>

As we got to the set and costume design phase and were interviewing designers, we presented them with our Green Initiative guidelines. We found wonderful designers who embraced these guidelines, and now that’s a criteria for hiring a designer.

For example, our set designer David F. Weiner needed to represent Wyoming, so instead of painting the backdrop we used projections. The projection screen was not made of a recyclable material, but we can save it and use it over and over again. We also used platforms from another company that had just finished a show and then, considering our exit strategy, found a local theatre company that needed platforms, and passed ours along to them. We used scrap wood from another theatre for our floor, and those can’t be used again, but they are going to be recycled.

## **Where do you hope to be in a year?**

We’ve applied for funding which will allow us to hire LEED accredited professionals to thoroughly research the impact our theatre is having on the environment, and to find out what we can do next. Right now, I feel like we’re boiling noodles and throwing them against the wall to see what sticks, so it’d be great to have more professional guidance from the green building industry.

## **How do your patrons respond to the Initiative?**

We have a ticket incentive that if they carpool or take public transportation or drive a hybrid then we email them a \$5 off coupon for the next show. So they’re conscious of it. I think there’s a general feeling that people want to do the right thing but we don’t know

what the right thing is some of the time, and it's hard. We're not feeling high and mighty about this [initiative], this is one little theatre company's attempt to try to do the right thing. As I like to say, we're very green at being green – so we want to reward our audience for taking these baby steps with us.

### **How do donors respond?**

Donors and audiences across the board support it. I think what's surprising is that some things are more expensive, but some things are not. The printing cost, not much more expensive, mainly because there's been such a pressure on the printing industry to be more environmentally conscious from the community.

And if it costs more in year one, then explain to your donors what you want to do, because we need the support of our donor and patron base to do this. And then budget accordingly for the next year. Our experience is that donors like being a part of positive change. We're being honest about the cost, about what we can do now and what we're going to have to wait five years to do. There's no shame in that.

It's also a great part of our marketing campaign. "Green Mo'olelo" generates a lot of interest. It brings new audiences to the theatre who hear about our eco-friendly programming and are excited by it.

### **What are your most popular Green Initiatives?**

From the public perception, it's the ticket discounts. People really, really respond to that. From our internal perspective, I'm most proud of the shift in the paints we now use. It's a little more expensive, but it's better for the crew, the audience, and the environment.

### **What is your biggest challenge?**

Lighting. Our designer was saying that there is more energy efficient lighting out there but it is hugely expensive. That's a big area that hasn't been figured out.

### **What is your final goal?**

I would love if we had, in San Diego, a green performance venue. Portland Center Stage moved into a building that's LEED certified and it's exciting that they're performing in a green building. That is the dream.

### **What would you say to other theaters thinking about Going Green?**

Go for it! It's okay to take baby steps, in fact I encourage baby steps— it makes it easier. And if you find something new, let me know, so we can use it too!

Jacqueline Goldfinger is a playwright and ECD dramaturg who recently moved from San Diego to Philadelphia. In San Diego, she worked for performing arts organizations including La Jolla Playhouse, The Old Globe, and North Coast Repertory Theatre. She currently resides in Philadelphia and is looking for work and a winter coat. Visit her online at: [www.jacquelinegoldfinger.com](http://www.jacquelinegoldfinger.com).

### **More Online Resources:**

— Participate in a discussion of environmentally friendly theater: [ecotheater.wordpress.com](http://ecotheater.wordpress.com)

— Check out Portland Center Stage's Green Building: [www.pcs.org/the\\_building](http://www.pcs.org/the_building)

— Visit Mo'olelo: [www.moolelo.net/](http://www.moolelo.net/)

— Read about Mo'olelo's upcoming production, Susan Yankowitz's *Night Sky*: [www.moolelo.net/stage/fall2008\\_stage.html](http://www.moolelo.net/stage/fall2008_stage.html)

<sup>1</sup> LEED, Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, is a program of the U.S. Green Building Council that helps organizations create eco-conscious work spaces. For more information: [www.usgbc.org](http://www.usgbc.org).

<sup>2</sup> Mo'olelo's guidelines are available online: [www.moolelo.net/mission/green.html](http://www.moolelo.net/mission/green.html).

<sup>3</sup> Visit: [www.greenlinepaper.com](http://www.greenlinepaper.com)

<sup>4</sup> FSC, Forest Stewardship Council, offers certifications to businesses that abide by eco-friendly standards. Read more online: [www.fscus.org](http://www.fscus.org).

# The Green Top Ten

## Ten Ways Your Theatre Can Go Green

### **10. Use energy more efficiently.**

Use energy efficient light bulbs and electronics wherever possible. Have your production manager contact stage lighting equipment suppliers about the most energy efficient stage lights and bulbs. Switch to Green Electricity throughout your facility (<http://www.greenenergychoice.com>).

### **9. Use water more efficiently.**

When installing plumbing, chose ultra-low flow toilets and metered fixtures.

### **8. Borrow/rent props, sets, and costumes from other theatres instead of building your own. Set up an exchange program in your local community between interested theatres.**

### **7. Order food family-style and ask the caterer to provide food in reusable containers. Buy beverages in large containers rather than individual cans or bottles.**

### **6. Use public transportation or none at all!**

Rent performance spaces near public transportation. Offer a discount if a patron shows a bus/train ticket stub. Encourage groups attending a show to carpool. Have a place for bicyclists to lock up their bikes. Provide visiting artists with public transit maps and offer to pay for part of their transportation if they use public transit. Have meetings via phone or internet so company members can participate from home.

### **5. Buy smart.**

Print your marketing campaign, scripts, and other materials on recycled paper. Order paint through the AFM (which offers environmentally friendly products and has a buy-back plan: [www.afmsafecoat.com](http://www.afmsafecoat.com)). Buy and build with recyclable woods (like bamboo). Obtain materials from salvage centers, contractors' donation sites, and thrift stores.

### **4. Clean efficiently.**

Use eco-friendly cleaning agents and energy-efficient vacuum cleaners. Ask House Managers to collect discarded programs after the show, smooth them out (stick them under a heavy box to eliminate wrinkles), and reuse them. Place recycling containers at the concession stand and bar.

### **3. Use email or password-protected websites to send and post Company Handbooks and other information electronically.**

### **2. Reuse everything.**

Encourage company members to bring their own mugs and dishware to rehearsals and meetings to cut down on using paper plates and cups. Instead of using paper cups, design company mugs to be reused for multiple events. Encourage company members (especially Stage Managers) to use both the front and backsides of paper before recycling them. Make announcements (or play taped announcements) pre-show instead of slipping extra fliers into the program. Have your designers submit their plans as early as possible, so that your shop can strategize about how to use the least material to make the most throughout the season.

### **1. Add recycling bins to your theater, office, and shop space.**

Most companies, theatrical or otherwise, have a recycling container near their copy machine for paper. Put separate recycling bins in other office areas (the Literary Department will need their own bin), in the lobby of your theater, and in the shop space for paper and other recyclable waste (bottles, cans, cardboard).

# A Member of the Ensemble

## The Devised Production of *In the Belly of the Beast with Two Backs*

by **Dennis Schebetta**

*This article is the fourth in a series, part of an ongoing collaboration between LMDA and the Dramaturgy Focus Group of the Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE). The Dramaturgy FG's Debut Panel annually selects talented Early Career Dramaturgs from across North America. For two years now, Review has invited the debutantes to revise and submit their conference papers. The results are consistently thoughtful, high-caliber work.*



Advertising postcard, *In the Belly of the Beast with Two Backs*. Produced at HERE Theatre in NYC. Image provided by author.

Dennis Schebetta is a director, dramaturg, and award-winning playwright whose work has been seen regionally and Off-Off Broadway. He currently lives in Seattle where he teaches at Bellevue Community College and is Regional Representative for The Dramatists Guild of America, Inc. He recently received his MFA from Virginia Commonwealth University and was on the 2007 ATHE Dramaturgy Debut panel.

### Introduction

Aemilia clutched an empty wine bottle in each hand as she crossed the rehearsal room and said, “I should have two of these.”

The ensemble broke out in laughter. That wasn’t Aemilia talking, but the actress Rachel Scott commenting on her tortured relationship to Iago. “Let’s start again,” said the director, Lisa Jackson, as she moved out of the playing space. Tango music blared out of the speaker of the small CD player and Aemilia went back to cleaning up the mess in the theatrical world of Storyville, New Orleans. The ensemble was entrenched in the first week of rehearsal and the second day in the studio on the fourth floor of Playwrights Horizons. The bright sunshine of summer poured in from the huge glass window.

As the music played, Rachel watched fellow actors Alex Smith and John-Andrew Morrison dance the tango. The dancing duo was Iago and Buddy (Othello in the world of our play). There was nothing arbitrary about the staging choice of two men dancing, or about what was being established in the relationships of these characters. Every movement in this devised show was being carefully orchestrated, and the story was unfolding not primarily through text, but through movement and the use of the playing space. Aemilia found herself drifting in the background of the scene, a grey ghost lurking in the shadows.

Suddenly, Bianca’s lover Jack (our Cassio, played by Matthew Morgan) jumped into the scene, wearing a women’s slip and looking for his fedora which was planted firmly on Iago’s balding head. After he performed a lewd leg-humping gesture, Jack won the hat back, just as Bianca, played by Melinda Ferraraccio, entered across the room and stood on one of the tables, cross-dressed in men’s clothes and mustache. Placing the hat on her head, Jack tossed her over his shoulder and ran off.

“Okay,” said Lisa, sitting next to me, “Let’s look again at the burlesque number.” Burlesque, in Shakespeare? Sure, it’s a few scenes after the clown routine.

Obviously, this was not your mother's Othello. In the *Belly of the Beast with Two Backs* was an adaptation of the Shakespearean play, conceived and directed by Lisa Jackson. Devised by the ensemble in rehearsals, it was first presented as a ten-minute piece at The Women's Project in New York City before being developed over the next year and a half into an hour-long performance at HERE Arts Center in August 2005 as part of the American Living Room Festival. Using Othello as its main source, the play also incorporated text from the novel *Coming Through Slaughter* by Michael Ondaatje and the collection of erotic stories set in New Orleans called *Red Wine Moan* by Jeri Cain Rossi. The Othello plot was set against the backdrop of Storyville in the early 1900s with Buddy Bolden replacing the legendary moor. Bolden was a historical jazz figure, a cornet player (some say the father of modern jazz) who died in an insane asylum. In this production, Desdemona's name changed to Nora, the name of Buddy's wife. Many images were used as inspiration, especially the photographs of the prostitutes taken by Ernst Belloq. Music — either jazz, folk, or the language of the text — also became central to the piece.

The text of this performance was not merely a collection of three literary sources, but also the movement of the actors' bodies, the vocal sounds, songs, music, and even the fights. The spoken text was always malleable and became secondary to the stories played out by the images, music, and movements of the actors. In many ways, we wrote the piece as we rehearsed. Although our primary source text was Othello, the director had trimmed the Shakespearean story in order to focus her lens on the complex relationships of the three main couples (Othello/Desdemona, Iago/Aemilia, Cassio/Bianca), blocking out any political and sociological subplots inherent in the Elizabethan text.

My role as dramaturg on this project was as an active member of the ensemble. I had worked with the director as a playwright several

times before and was being called upon for my experience as a dramatist. My job was to offer consultation on the narrative and structural elements, but I was not there to write or rewrite any text. I was to be confidante and collaborator, someone to witness and ask questions, but not to ultimately make final decisions. In addition, I worked as an archivist and historian, instrumental in preparing the text for rehearsal and performance, commenting on early drafts, adding or cutting text and formatting the script. But all of those activities underlined my main goal of opening up a dialogue with the director, allowing her room to discover what the piece was striving to become.

### Beginning with Images

Ernest J. Belloq was a photographer active in the early 1900s in New Orleans. A familiar presence in Storyville, he managed to take several portraits of the prostitutes working there. Many were of solitary nude women, standing near or lying on their beds. A few wore items of clothing, such as stockings. One or two even wore masks. Only eighty nine of these photographs have survived and were found after his death. Many of the faces of the nudes were scratched out, supposedly by Belloq's brother, a Roman Catholic priest (Rose 60). The reason why these photographs have become so interesting is that unlike other photographs of the age taken merely for carnal entertainment, his portraits seem to have an intimacy and unique point of view. One photo in particular (plate 33) has a woman standing in front of a bed wearing nothing but black stockings, one arm behind her lower back, the other resting languidly on a bedpost. The photo conveys a casualness that is not lewd, but certainly in conflict with the completely scratched out face. As Janet Malcolm wrote in reaction to his work, "Although the 'male gaze'...had not yet been raised as such, the friendliness of Belloq's eye, the reciprocity that flowed between him and his subjects, could not but forcibly strike the viewer" (12).

These photos, especially the ones with scratched out faces, became a major inspiration for Jackson when she developed the ten-minute show for The Women's Project & Productions. I witnessed this short version as an outsider, an audience member titillated and provoked by Bianca's burlesque number and disturbed by the final image of Desdemona searching a sea of handkerchiefs as Othello approached her. Many months later I began collaborating with the director, expanding the length and depth of the show into a longer, more developed script.

Morrison, the actor who played Buddy, called the final show "the story of Othello with digressions" (qtd. from Jackson Interview). *Beast* was not merely a transposition of the text of Othello resituated in Storyville but was similar to the "textual collidings" of the Irondale Ensemble Project (Niesen 283). Jackson used three different source texts to contrast with each other and therefore create a new text. The techniques utilized by Jackson were similar to those seen in the work of Susan Jonas, such as re-contextualization by using interpolation and interruption and exploring gender roles to serve the aim of disturbing the audience's relationship to a classic work (Jonas 249). The other textual sources from the novella *Red Wine Moan* helped Jackson as she focused her lens on the couples, highlighting not only the male/female power struggles, but also the male/male



Jenn Saltzstein as Nora and Rachel Scott as Aemilia, in *In the Belly of the Beast with Two Backs*.  
Photo and copyright by Patty Melamed.

and female/female relationships. In addition, minimal selections from the novel *Coming Through Slaughter* allowed easy access to the world of Storyville via Ondaatje's striking textual imagery. Buddy Bolden inhabited the character of Othello. Bolden was a celebrated cornet player, known for inventing "the big four," the beat that gives jazz its lilting quality. His wife Nora, an ex-prostitute, thus became the Desdemona to his Othello. Jackson streamlined Iago's character as she focused his obsession with Aemilia's suggested infidelity to the Moor. Bianca was a hybrid of the Shakespearean character and the female protagonist in Rossi's novella who was addicted to her lover Jack, a character who replaced Cassio.

The Othello story was the interior frame from which the piece aligned or deviated. The ultimate structure seemed collage-like, but the order of scenes was never random. The events in the narrative remain similar, but the way the story unfolds illuminates much that is hidden in the Shakespearean source. As the director/writer said in an interview, "My interest always in putting a piece together is juxtaposition...and then it comes together in the composition" (Jackson interview). This juxtaposition allows Jackson to force the audience to view familiar scenes in a new way, much like Brecht's *verfremdungseffekt*. Thus, the revelation of Othello's handkerchief in Cassio's hand (Act IV.I) becomes an elaborate clown routine in which the infamous handkerchief is presented at the end of a series of pratfalls and physical comedy. In the original classic, we never get Bianca's perspective on the events, but in this new version she performs a burlesque number relaying directly to the audience how Jack has used her. Throughout the show there are hints of bisexuality, elements of cross-dressing, and modern pop songs mixed with Appalachian folk songs. Even dialogue expectations are broken, as some famous lines are spoken not by the original characters. For example, instead of Othello saying his famous, "Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore" (Act III.iii. 359), Nora recites it wearing a blindfold and groping about in darkness.

Although Jackson has directed many traditional Shakespeare productions in addition to working in new play development, her training and background is steeped in alternative methods of theatre-making and devising techniques reliant on vocal and physical training. She used a methodology of gesture work derived from her training with Ellen Hemphill of the Archipelego Theatre in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. A "gesture," Jackson says is:

a vocal or corporeal kinesthetic response to a prompt, which can be a word, sound or image, that encapsulates one's own personal relationship to the prompt into a full body, or specific vocal, image. The "gestures" [...] become a consistent secondary text residing beside and within the perceived primary text of the performance (Interview).

The gestures are a personal and intimate physical vocabulary repeated often throughout the piece. In the creation of these gestures, the actors collaborate in a collective dramaturgy, creating another unspoken text which allows the disparate elements of written text and songs to meld together. The combination of these spoken and unspoken texts creates an entirely new text, and thus the story of Othello is reborn.

### **The challenges of devised dramaturgy:**

As a dramaturg, working on *Beast* was like working on three different concurrent shows: a classic, an adaptation, and a new work. Some of the preliminary areas of the script had been improvised using the gesture work in the initial ten-minute version, but as the schedule for the *HERE* production was so tight (one week of rehearsal in June and two weeks in August), textual choices and the overall structure of the piece had to be fleshed out before rehearsals began with the ensemble. My work began in the pre-production and planning phase. In many conversations with the director, I helped shape the selection and editing of spoken text as well as the rough outline of physicalizations in the form of a rough draft in play script format.

I approached this rough pre-production script in the same manner that I would as a dramaturg working with any new play: by supporting the writer to discover and unearth the story she wanted to tell. My background as a dramatist contributed to her thoughts on the structural order of the scenes. My questions would range from, "why does this line occur here?" to "how long should the song be for the clown number?" Lisa's initial stage descriptions were complex choreographic suggestions of behavior, as yet to be fully written in rehearsal. Some choices had to wait till rehearsal to be made. One stage description in particular merely said, "At some point, Aemilia enters." But if she entered at the beginning of the scene it would be vastly different than if she entered at the end, and only in rehearsal would we be able to tell which would work best for the play.

The textual choices that emerged out of this initial draft created a poetic combination of selections from the source material. The play flowed like a piece of jazz music. First you might hear the horn, then a bass line, back to a horn, then a saxophone, before drums kick in and all the instruments play. Here's an example from a page of the script using all three texts:

NORA: ...You were showing all the possibilities in the middle of the story. Something about the man that carries his profession with him, always.

Enter Aemilia unseen at end of this speech.

BUDDY: Like a wife. Even in Exile. (He kisses her, then softly says) One more, one more! / Be thus when thou art dead, and I will kill thee, / And love thee after. One more, and that's the last! So sweet was n'er so fatal. / I am drunk on the blood of this beautiful girl.

NORA: Will you come to bed, my lord?

The passage begins with excerpts from Ondaatje's novel, then switches to Othello's speech, then Rossi's line, "I am drunk..." before returning to Shakespeare. At times the juxtaposition of texts was contradictory and at other times the poetic language blended in such a way that it was hard to tell the authors apart. The three source texts were in dialogue with each other, creating a new dialogue, a new context, which then had a dialogue with the audience.

In order to understand the director/writer's vision, I thoroughly read all three of the source texts. Not only did I make notes, but I also found snippets of text that might be useful at a later point in the

process. Several times in rehearsal we found holes in transitions or areas where a line could be altered, cut or inserted. When that need arose, I easily searched my text bank and offered ideas to be selected by the director. One example occurred immediately before Iago tricks Jack into being blindfolded and pummeled by Buddy, he says “What’s he then that says I play the villain?” The rest of the speech had been cut. Unfortunately, there was some lag time before Jack entered to pick up the pile of handkerchiefs. I suggested to Jackson that since she was already playing with moving texts from one character to another, why not have Iago say one of Othello’s lines, such as “It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul.” This moment stood out as another conversation between audience and text and jarred expectations.

Jackson often directs her shows with minimal production requirements, usually without a set and only a few props. It’s an aesthetic choice as much as a practical one. As she stated, “I say my plays are Brechtian, but really they just have no budget” (Interview). Her previous works, *1st Witch*, *2nd Witch*, *3rd Witch* and *Swimmies* were both designed for fringe festival parameters—each show could be packed up in a large trunk in order to take it home on the subway. This aesthetic remained true of *Beast*, as well. The set consisted of a few rehearsal blocks, some chairs, and a ladder. Props were minimal; wine bottles, umbrellas, straight razor, handkerchiefs. Costumes were merely evocative of the early 1900s and most of the items were provided from the actors’ closets. Jackson did not aim at doing a period piece but a show that was “always in the moment, of the moment, that we’re living in” (Interview). Our Storyville was not meant to depict a realistic portrayal but rather a theatrical space that allowed for a conversation about Othello and ownership in the con-

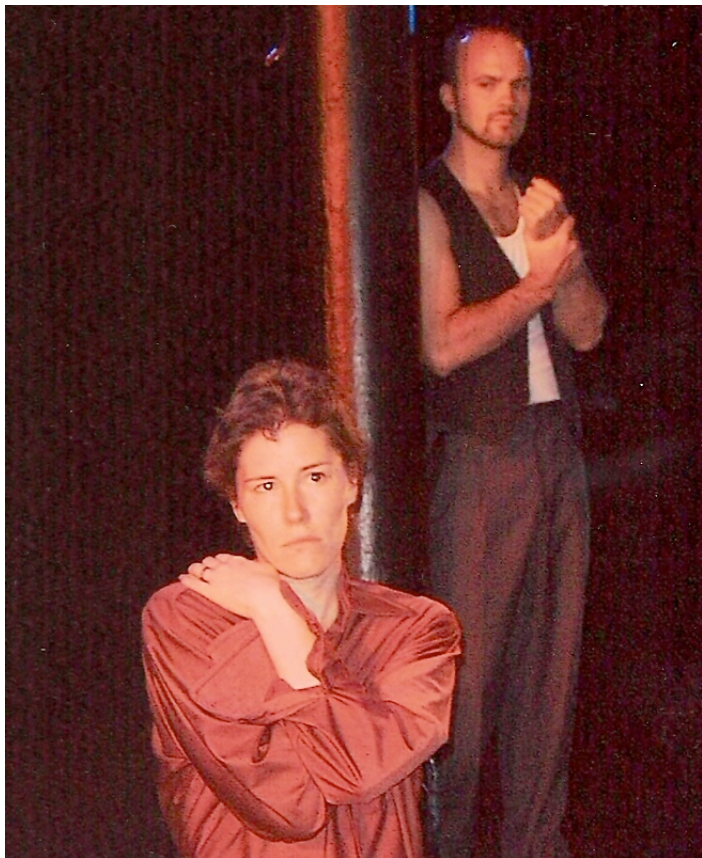
text of today, knowing that the story and location brings its own ideological baggage into the room as well as audience familiarity. This familiarity allowed us to disrupt, question or break expectations.

Since Buddy Bolden is considered the “king of jazz,” music selection was a critical part of my work on the pre-production script. In one section of the play, Iago talks of the first time he heard Buddy’s cornet, and Jackson wanted some music to heighten the line. However, Buddy never recorded. Fortunately, I found a live recording of Wynton Marsalis mimicking Buddy’s tone and style, which fit perfectly. Traditional jazz songs which would have been found in the early 1900s were juxtaposed against other musical choices: Robert Johnson’s “They’re Red Hot” which we used for the clown number, Chet Baker’s “Let’s Get Lost” for a party scene, and the contemporary song “Two to Tango” by Raul Malo for the burlesque number.

My two most tangible contributions to the shaping of the script were giving the scenes titles and formatting the text in standard play script format. Both of these stemmed from my work as a dramatist sitting in rehearsals on new works and anticipating necessary revisions and methods of documenting script changes.

Giving scenes titles has been a tremendous help for me as a playwright or director working on a new script, and this was the first time that I applied the method to my dramaturgy position. Titles are like signposts on the highway, helping to guide the way towards some comprehensive idea of the story. Giving titles requires one to encapsulate the actions, images, and metaphors inherent in that scene. Scoring the script in this manner became an excellent barometer on whether or not the director and I were in agreement. We discussed the driving force of each scene by using titles with evocative language, most of which was chosen from the spoken words in her script. Some of the titles were named, “First Parade or Fuck It, Let’s Get Drunk,” “I Have a Thing For You,” or “Mother’s Maid.” Many changed based on our discussions before and after rehearsals. We did not always agree, of course, but this methodology allowed us to converse in a more creative way, beyond character wants, structure, or audience expectations.

My other function as a dramaturg was modifying and revising the script as it changed on a daily basis, thus documenting the process as I helped shape it. In order to ensure consistency and accuracy, I formatted the script in pre-production and during rehearsals. Although formatting text into a standard script format might seem a minor technical contribution, it actually had huge ramifications and a rippling effect on the rest of the production process. At the first read-thru when the entire ensemble was collected for that final two weeks, it was easier for the actors to comprehend what was going to be asked of them. The dialogue and physical actions were immediately clear, including entrances and exits, and the placements of songs, either canned or live. Even the stage directions that said, “something happens here” gave a clear indication of work that needed to be done in rehearsal. The actors had a tangible form of what the director was thinking and what needed to be filled out in rehearsal. They knew that lines would be changed and that entire scenes might be reconfigured but this script allowed them a place to begin their work of shaping character and actions. As we rehearsed, many changes were made but the script revisions were always clearly marked on a daily basis, with new pages printed out periodically. Revisions were



Rachel Scott as Aemilia and Alex Smith as Iago  
Photo and copyright by Patty Melamed.



marked on each new page, usually in red, saving time and eliminating confusion. When we arrived for the technical rehearsal, we had not only the blueprint of the performance in written form, but a script that could be used as a promptbook by the stage manager and lighting designer.

For me, this revision and documentation process was exciting, like “backwards playwriting.” I found myself translating the physical and spoken text in rehearsal onto the page, discovering the best way to translate actors’ behaviors and intentions. Documenting the physical text, including the gesture work, became a vital part of the process and required me to be present and focused in the rehearsal room. This interpretive act seemed the opposite of my dramatic writing process, where I start with a blank page and have to take the imaginative leap of seeing actors performing in my mind’s eye. Like with any play, I had to be specific in the language and directions, and yet create the necessary space that exists in all plays for future productions.

From an ideological standpoint, having this formatted script elevated the physical and ensemble-based work that was developed in rehearsal from some ephemeral idea into a more tangible element. The script started to look like a “real play” and this brought an element of validation. The director had never had a dramaturg work in this way before and consequently never documented her process or her product. As she said:

I think the problem with physical and devised work is that you’re often creating on the fly so much that there’s nobody there to document anything, and to document in an active way, to be able to see what’s working, what’s not working, and raise questions and challenge the director... (Jackson, Interview).

As a member of the ensemble, I knew the history of choices and could make suggestions based on my knowledge of the source material and presence in rehearsals.

### “So Fucking Beautiful”: Four Minutes of Silence

Susan Jonas has said: “Theatermakers can employ the canon to reveal its own biases about gender, as well as race, sexual preference, and other issues and sensitivities” (244). In the *Belly of the Beast* with *Two Backs* recontextualized *Othello* in a way that empowered those disempowered in the Shakespearean source text, namely the women. In Shakespeare’s text, the women are subservient to the male narrative. In this production, the female roles took center stage. By cutting the text and giving the women as much, or more, stage time than the men, the director changed the way the audience witnessed the play. Instead of the male-dominated narrative, the audience saw a magnified look at the way the women react to being treated as objects used and discarded, like so many dirty handkerchiefs.

Jackson told me at the beginning of the process that the entire play explored ownership; ownership of the body, of love, of others. Through their words and actions, Aemilia, Nora, and Bianca were viewed as objects to be owned. But these women can’t be owned, and there lies the conflict. This focus also examined how these female characters related to each other, especially Aemilia to Nora.

And this is where my gender gave me a little bit of trouble. Some-

times dramaturgs are wrong. We don’t like to admit it because we like being the smartest person in the room. Yet, we’ve all encountered these moments when we lack the perspective or experience to contribute and would be better off if we just kept our mouth shut. My moment was when I first watched Scene 9, titled “So Fucking Beautiful” which replaces Act IV.3 in *Othello* (Aemilia prepares Desdemona for bed, and ultimately for her death). In our version, Aemilia, wearing black, dresses Nora for the final scene which is a dance at a nightmarish masquerade ball. She helps Nora out of a white dress and into a black gown. The scene ends with Bianca’s entrance, wearing a carnival mask and both Nora and Aemilia don their own masks. The way the actors performed their movements was methodical, as if steeped in ritual. The scene as played out in the *HERE* performance lasted four minutes. Not one word was spoken.

Four minutes of silence on stage is a long time. As an audience member, it made me uncomfortable. I felt the rising action created by the prior fight scene among Iago, *Othello*, and Jack gave momentum to the performance and then suddenly the whole play stopped. After the dress rehearsal, I questioned Jackson about its inclusion in the play.

At the time, Jackson could not clearly articulate why the scene was silent or what her intent was, but she was adamant about keeping it intact. She replied, “It’s funny, because only the men in the ensemble seem to have a problem with it. The women get it.” This made me question my own perception of the experience. It was not until the first performance at *HERE* that I realized the power and effectiveness of the scene. And it was foolish of me, because the goal of that scene was to break expectations, the ones inherent not just in *Othello*, but those expectations being created within our show. I was glad to question the scene, though, because in the questioning of the scene, both the director and I realized, even without being able to say why, that the scene was necessary.

Years later, I realize that the scene operates on more levels than just gender relationships. The Aemilia/Desdemona scene in Act IV is a familiar scene from *Othello*, especially for women. In fact, it’s the only scene in Shakespeare’s play without any men. The audience would bring certain expectations, and Jackson wanted to show it with fresh perspective. In *Beast*, the silent scene strengthens the idea that Nora and Aemilia can’t connect to each other, even when alone and involved in such an intimate ritual as dressing. The audience desires to hear those familiar words spoken, but none are. Dramaturgically, it is a moment both in *Othello* and *Beast*, when the spoken word could avert tragedy.

This idea of unspoken words, or rather of women speaking despite their lower social status, relates back to the visual representations inherent in the Bellocq photographs which inspired the piece. Just as those images offer glimpses into a private and feminine world, so does this play. Each of the women’s scenes creates an alternative narrative, one hidden beneath the text of *Othello* (a narrative scratched out by the men’s actions, ultimately). Many of the visual movements that Jackson created in the show all relate to this idea, whether it be Nora searching for a handkerchief in a sea of handkerchiefs or Bianca’s burlesque show. The alternative narrative has overcome the traditional story of *Othello*; it is now the story of a woman murdered. Consequently, it also tells the story of those surviving women who are still treated like discarded playthings. I realize now that the cli-

max of the play is not the fight scene (a sign of male aggression) but the silent scene. Those four minutes are when Jackson forces the audience to stop and take notice of what they are looking at. In the context of our play, this seemingly pedestrian act of dressing elevates to a ritualistic sacrifice in which the audience bears witness.

## Conclusion

It may seem incongruous that a dramatist showers praise on the beauty and simplicity of a powerful nonverbal scene. But it's easy to forget that dramatic storytelling involves more than just writing strong dialogue. Playwrights create a blueprint for an event in three-dimensional space; an event involving characters, actions and a plot set within a fictional world. A play is not a story to be read (though some plays can and usually are) but an act to be performed. And devising work is simply another form of playwriting.

Idolizing only the words in a play precludes the physical vocabularies of movement-based work. The body's movements are not merely mechanical actions jotted down in the form of stage descriptions but are also a concurrent text. Debussy once said that the music is not the notes, but the space between the notes. In that same way, theatre is beautiful and powerful because of those moments in between the words. Four minutes of silence might seem baffling in a traditional production of *Othello*. Yet in the context of *Beast* it beautifully illuminated the intentions of the writer/director and a story which originated from the grainy shadows of those Bellocq images.

Dramaturgs are sometimes thought of as "guardians of the text," but this idea is only helpful if we expand our definitions of "text" to include all its forms. As I move forward in my work as a dramatist and a dramaturg, I am now more conscious of that space between the words and the performance.

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John-Andrew Morrison as Buddy, Jenn Saltstein as Nora and Alex Smith as Iago

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