

Winter 2012

Review: The Journal of Dramaturgy, volume 22, issue 2

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Review

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PHOTO: CYNTHIA SORELLE



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EDITOR'S NOTE

While this issue of *Review* was not conceived of as being thematic, as I read the proofs I noticed ideas about storytelling and community vibrating in sympathy with one another across several of the pieces collected here. Perhaps it is the time of year: as days grow shorter and we bundle ourselves up against the cold, the evolutionary imperative of community crystalizes before our eyes. We need each other to survive.

The shared ritual of sitting together and watching a story unfold is one of the ways in which humans have built community for thousands of years. But at least as important as the communal witnessing is the active engagement of the audience with ideas embodied on our stages. This, too, is a matter of survival. And our work as dramaturgs and literary managers is central to that.

This issue of *Review* opens with Douglas Langworthy's Elliott Hayes Award acceptance speech, which describes his extraordinary work on the Denver Center Theatre Company's production of *Ruined* by Lynn Nottage. Doug reached out to a local non-profit for help understanding the context of the play. That gesture turned into a months-long collaboration culminating in a trip to Uganda for a local theatre festival.

We are thrilled to publish playwright Pearl Cleage's keynote speech from LMDA's annual conference in Atlanta last summer. In it, Ms. Cleage speaks poetically about the intersection of identity, community, art, and activism, of her recent struggle to become an American writer who tells the "stories of a new America."

Review

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Jules Odendahl-James and Jane Barnette engage in a lively conversational review of Michael Mark Chemers' recent book *Ghost Light: An Introductory Handbook for Dramaturgy*, a significant contribution to dramaturgy in educational settings.

Hector Garza interviews Adam Versényi about his online journal *The Mercurian* and the two discuss in concrete terms both the theory and artistry of translation for the stage.

We conclude this issue with another peer-reviewed article, this time by Scott Taylor of Western Washington University. In it, he explores trends in contemporary French *dramaturgie* through a case study of a Québécois production of Michel Azama's play *Croisades*.

As always, we look forward to receiving your responses to the work and to hearing from those of you who are interested in contributing to our ongoing conversation with an essay, manifesto, article, production notebook, or anything else you think might be useful or interesting to our audience. Send inquiries to me at editor@lmda.org.

Finally, I wish to express publicly my thanks to Layout Editor Debra Cardona, Associate Editor Janine Sobeck, Martine Kei Green-Rogers, Josiane Dubois, and Tyannah Price for all their help getting this issue finished at last.

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Inquiries from prospective contributors are welcome. All inquiries should be directed to Sydney Cheek-O'Donnell: editor@lmda.org. Review Volume 22 number 2, Winter 2012.

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ELLIOT HAYES AWARD ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

From Denver to Gulu, With Thanks to Lynn Nottage

Douglas Langworthy

Atlanta, June 30, 2012

This is the story of my tumble down a dramaturgical rabbit hole that, to my surprise, deposited me on the other side of the planet.

In February 2011, the Denver Center Theatre Company—the theatre where I work—began rehearsals for its production of Lynn Nottage’s beautifully written, brutal anti-war drama, *Ruined*. About six months prior to that, I was introduced to Karen Sugar, a Denver woman who runs a non-profit that helps empower women in post-conflict Uganda through micro-loans and education. Little did I know that that meeting would fundamentally change the course of my dramaturgy on Nottage’s play, and ultimately take me all the way to Africa.

The collaboration between the Denver Center and Women’s Global Empowerment Fund (WGEF), Sugar’s organization, was built on a solid foundation. As an expert in the part of the world in which the play is set, Karen came to that first meeting with a good dose of skepticism. What did we want? How authentic was this drama in portraying a fiendishly complex and violent war? Fortunately, once she read *Ruined* she loved it, impressed not only with the emotional truth of the play, but also the depth and accuracy of Nottage’s research.

The next phase of our collaboration was to determine how Sugar, who works with women in Gulu, Uganda, a region that has been conflict-free for six years, could help me contextualize the play for our artists and audience. She pointed out that the war that is still raging in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where *Ruined* is set, had devastated northern Uganda for over twenty years. The women of Uganda have had the past handful of years to start rebuilding their lives. The hardships and violence that Nottage’s characters were facing had been suffered by the women Karen helps. Her clients could speak honestly to all the issues in the play, but from a healing perspective. This collaboration had the potential to take a dire situation and offer a degree of hope. I had found my way in.

DOUGLAS LANGWORTHY is currently the Literary Manager and Dramaturg at the Denver Center Theatre Company. Prior to Denver, Douglas served as Dramaturg and Director of Play Development at McCarter Theatre in Princeton, NJ for two years and Director of Literary Development and Dramaturgy at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival (OSF) for seven. While at OSF he developed an adaptation of Dumas’ *The Three Musketeers* with Linda Alper and Penny Metropulos, a new musical, *Tracy’s Tiger*, with the same team and composer Sterling Tinsley, and a new translation of Brecht’s *The Good Person of Szechuan*. Douglas has translated 15 plays from the German, which include *Spring Awakening* by Frank Wedekind and *The Prince of Homburg*, *Penthesilea* and *Amphitryon* by Heinrich von Kleist. His translation of Goethe’s *Faust* was produced in New York City by Target Margin Theatre.



Douglas Langworthy, posing with The Elliott Hayes Award.

But there's one more important piece to the puzzle. The synergy between the Denver Center and WGEF got even closer when Karen told me that her clients have been holding an annual drama festival. Divided into groups of anywhere from one to twenty, the women create plays, monologues or dances to present before the community at large. Each year has a theme that is selected by the women that speaks to an issue they deem to be of critical importance in their lives. So not only does WGEF empower women through micro-loans and education, they also empower them through drama.

In December, before rehearsals started, Karen brought to Denver one of her most successful clients, Grace Akello. Grace had already started a number of small businesses, and was planning to run for local office. (She won the election and now plans to run for national Parliament.) Every year she writes a monologue to present at the festival. So while she was in Denver we pulled together a small event at which we showed video of the drama festival and Grace spoke and answered audience questions. (Conveniently for us the common European language in Uganda is English, whereas in the Congo it's French.) This event dovetailed nicely with the Denver Center's Women's Voices Fund, an endowment to support the work of women playwrights and directors. Since Grace wouldn't be around during the rehearsal period, I filmed an interview with her, footage that I could share with the actors when they arrived in February.

One of the first things I wanted to do once rehearsals were underway was set up a Skype session between the actors in *Ruined* and a group of women in Uganda. On the second day of rehearsal, we gathered the actors in a large conference room and, after an introduction by Karen, the actors and director started Skyping with a half dozen women in Gulu. The actors asked difficult and at times painful questions which the women answered freely and with great honesty. The session lasted about an hour and gave the actors a strong personal connection to the material that would underpin their performances. Nottage's play is starkly realistic, and this

conversation brought the play to life in a way that all the book research in the world could never do. (But nonetheless I prepared an 80-page research packet, feeling it's best to approach context from a variety of angles.)

Once the show was up and running, we held a number of talkbacks with the cast that Karen attended. Many of the actors spoke of the effect the Skype session had had on them. The war in the Congo is extremely complicated, with numerous armies and rebel groups vying for power, and Karen was able to be on hand to provide valuable historical and political context. One of the key engines of the war, Karen explained, was the greed for minerals, including coltan, a substance that is used in most of our electronic gadgets like the iPad and the iPhone. I created a video loop for the lobby called "The High Cost of Coltan" to highlight this issue.

Along the way I had been hearing bits and pieces of what kinds of outreach other theatres were doing around their productions of *Ruined*. At last year's LMDA conference in Denver, I chaired a panel that explored this further. I was truly impressed by the wide array of both local and international efforts dramaturgs across the United States and Canada had launched around the play. Working with local Congolese communities, enhanced talkbacks, lecture series, films—one theatre even had a 5K run to raise funds for women in the Congo.

Then, to fully complete the circle, the Denver Center sent me to Africa to attend the 2011 WGEF drama festival! The only assignment the theatre gave me was to blog about my experience and post it on the Denver Center's website. Before I left that September, I also proposed an article to *American Theatre* magazine about my trip and they agreed. So my experiences would be disseminated to Denver theatergoers as well as a broader national audience.

While in Gulu I was able to visit many women in the businesses they had created with their micro-loans: selling vegetables at the market, crushing rock at the quarry, or running small farms. But the centerpiece of the trip was the drama festival itself. The theme that year was the right of women to own land. (Currently the constitution allows it, but tribal customs prohibit it.) Two days before the event Women's Global held a town hall meeting that was informative and at times confrontational. It was clear that this was a hot-button issue.

The plays, written by WGEF clients, took the form of agit-prop theatre, using humor and broad characters to tell stories grounded in the issue of land ownership. Some of the funniest performances were given by the women who played men, who subversively stayed in character all day, not just while performing. The playwrights used laughter to hook the audience (both men and women) and keep them engaged with the play until its message had been made. It was a revelation to see how effectively these women, with no formal theatre training but steeped in the traditions of storytelling, were using drama as a vibrant form of public discourse.

I came back to the States reinvigorated and ready to tell my story. Based on my blog, the *American Theatre* article appeared in the February 2012 issue, which was devoted to global citizenship. It was distributed to the Denver Center board of directors as well as attendees of the Colorado New Play Summit.

Over the past few years I have become more and more interested in connecting dramaturgically with our local community. In partnering with Karen Sugar and the Women's Global Empowerment Fund, I was able to use a local resource to go global. I would never have believed that my desire to provide dramaturgical context would result in my traveling to Africa.

The Denver Center's relationship with WGEF and the women of Gulu continues. Next February we hope to bring one of the Ugandan playwrights to Denver for our New Play Summit. Karen is even hoping to help Gulu build its first permanent theatre structure, as well as help other NGOs start their own drama festivals. She's asked me to be involved in both efforts. Oh yes, last month Grace Akello again visited Denver and was able to view archival footage of our production of *Ruined*, closing that loop.

Looking back, I guess the biggest lesson I learned is that there are riches to be mined by extending your dramaturgical tentacles into your local community. With an open mind and a willingness to learn, you may find yourself like I did traveling down roads you could never have foreseen.

Learning to Speak American: A Writer's Journey

Pearl Cleage

*Keynote Remarks Delivered at the Annual Conference of the
Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas
Alliance Theatre, Atlanta, GA
June 28, 2012*

PEARL CLEAGE is an Atlanta-based playwright and novelist. Her plays include *The Nacirema Society*, *Flyin' West*, *Blues for an Alabama Sky*, *Bourbon at the Border*, and *A Song for Coretta*. She has written eight novels, including *What Looks Like Crazy on an Ordinary Day*, which was an Oprah Book Club selection and spent nine weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list.

Pearl and her husband, writer Zaron W. Burnett, Jr., collaborated on the award-winning performance series *Live at Club Zebra!* for 10 years. In 1973, Pearl was a speechwriter for the Maynard Jackson campaign and later served as his first press secretary.

Thinking about coming here today, I was reminded of my father, who was an earnest young seminary student in December of 1941. He delivered his first public sermon in Oberlin, Ohio, on the morning of the bombing of Pearl Harbor, although when he stood up behind the pulpit, he had no idea what was happening and was mainly concerned with how well he was going to perform on this, his maiden voyage.

He delivered his remarks without incident to an attentive congregation, participated in the rest of the service, and, at the end of the benediction, walked down the middle aisle and out into the Sunday morning sunshine to discover that the world as he had known it had changed forever.

Years later, he would tell the story and shake his head to confess that at the end of that long and terrible day, when he finally dragged himself home and sat down, he couldn't remember a single word of what he had preached that morning. *Not a word.*

It was an important lesson for a young preacher—not to waste an opportunity to say something meaningful, and as I think of it now, I hope that the thoughts I share with you today are in some way a part of a larger conversation about the role that writers can and must play in our country and in our lives.

In some parts of the world, we would not be allowed to come together like this to share ideas about what it means to be human beings, in all our fiercely flawed fabulousness. In some parts of the world, writers are considered dangerous and unpredictable, committed as we are to looking at the truth as hard as we possibly can and then finding a way to communicate what we've seen to others of our kind.

Sometimes as part of this process, writers also feel free to make suggestions about a better way to do it, whatever *it* is; fall in love, organize the community around us, energize the campus we move around



Pearl Cleage speaking at the 2012 LMDA Conference at Atlanta's Alliance Theatre.

on, feed people, and stop the wars that are raging around the world in our name at this very moment.

Because a writer's basic job is to seek the truth, and speak the truth, they are always the enemies of those who would twist the facts toward their own ends. This is why despots and generals are sometimes so frightened by the power of words on paper that they put the writers in jail or have them censored or tortured or killed.

That doesn't happen here, and for that I am conscious and grateful, because things can change for better or worse in a heartbeat, but I'm getting ahead of myself...

Listen to the words of Langston Hughes:

*Life is a big sea,
Full of many fish.
I let down my nets
And pull...*

"Melodramatic maybe it seems to me now," he wrote,

but then it was like throwing a million bricks out of my heart when I threw the books into the water. I leaned over the rail of the S.S. Malone and threw the books as far as I could out into the sea—all the books I had had at Columbia, and all the books I had lately bought to read. The books went down onto the moving water in the dark off Sandy Hook. Then I straightened up, turned my face to the wind, and took a deep breath. I was a seaman going to sea for the first time—a seaman on a big merchant ship. And I felt nothing would ever happen to me again that I didn't want to happen. I felt grown, a man, inside and out. Twenty-one. I was twenty-one.

When Langston Hughes wrote those words in 1940, on the first page of the first volume of his luminous autobiography, *The Big Sea*, I wasn't even a gleam in my father's eye. It would be five years before the book went through three printings, including a 1945 edition, published on thin yellow paper because of war restrictions, and another year before Langston's wanderings brought him to

Springfield, Massachusetts on April 27, 1946, where my father had a church and where the author signed a copy of his book for my grandfather, who was visiting us from Detroit. *For A.B. Cleage, MD, with the sincere regards of Langston Hughes.*

It would be another two years before I was born, and another five before my mother began to read *The Big Sea* to my sister and me at bedtime like other mothers read fairy tales. I come from a family of devoted readers, and a fair number of frustrated writers, who have finally found their full expression in me, the first full-time, professional writer my family has ever produced, and I never forget that I carry their dreams of freedom and safety and peace alongside my own.

How can I forget? I have ancestors buried here in unmarked graves behind long forgotten plantation houses.

My grandparents were born in the American South. Their grandparents were bought and sold here. It used to be a capital crime here for us to learn to read, much less *learn to/yearn* to write like Langston.

But, I have always known I was a writer. When I was two years old, I stood leaning against the bars of my crib, telling my oldest sister the latest installment in the continuing saga of the life of Tecumseh, the Native American Chief who had somehow taken up residence in my mind after I spotted a small tear in the wallpaper above my pillow that to my two-year-old eye looked like an eagle, which lead me to Native Americans, which lead me to Tecumseh, who, in my saga, was strong and passionate and doomed by fate or history or bad karma to preside at the demise of his people, a peculiar combination of characteristics that continues to interest me all these years later.

I have always known I was a writer. My earliest memory is of snow the winter of my first birthday. I remember leaning against the cold glass of our front door wondering who had replaced the weathered wooden slats of our porch with a spotless carpet of white that extended from the top step, down the walkway and up to the roof of my father's car parked at the end of it. I remember thinking that whatever it was looked *soft*. Cold was still an abstract idea, a distant wind that my mother guarded against with hats, and gloves, and scarves, and boots, and blankets, and buntings, and my father warming the car before she brought the baby out. That was me.

Years later, I remembered all that when my southern born daughter, then aged two, walked up to her first ever bank of upper Michigan mid-winter snow and fell into it, smiling broadly. As we pulled her out, sputtering with surprise and indignation, my mother said, "I think she thought it was going to be soft." *Of course she did*, I thought, wiping my daughter's face gently. *Didn't everybody?*

I graduated from high school in 1966. It was quite a year. U.S. Forces in Vietnam hovered at 185,000. Stokely Carmichael was named Chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, promptly uttered the words Black Power from the back of a flatbed truck on a Mississippi highway and changed the course of the Civil Rights Movement forever. Julian Bond was denied a seat in the Georgia House of

Representatives because of his opposition to the war in Vietnam, which Martin Luther King had already denounced as a “sordid military adventure.” Robert Weaver became the first black cabinet member when he was sworn in as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development and the first World Festival of Black Art was held in Dakar, Senegal.

Bill Russell was named coach of the Boston Celtics and became the first black man to coach an established team in professional sports. The National Welfare Rights Organization was energized by African American women who were sick and tired of being sick and tired. Civil Rights pioneer James Meredith was shot on U.S. Highway 51 on the second day of a voter registration march from Memphis to Jackson and racial violence in forty-three cities saw eleven killed, more than four hundred injured and three thousand arrested.

The America that had twice elected Dwight D. Eisenhower president was gone forever. Change was in the air, the voice of the people was carried on the wind, all things were possible and I was a first year playwriting student at Howard University, away from my mother’s watchful eye for the first time, drunk on my sudden independence and that peculiar sixties energy that made those of us who came of age during those days actually believe that we could make love and make revolution and still get the grades we needed to keep our scholarships and prepare ourselves to assume our rightful place within the vanguard as members of the class of 1970.

We were dragging our parents and our professors and our country kicking and screaming into the next phase of our collective national life. Is it any wonder then that as a writer I embraced fully the African American literary tradition that required both activism and aesthetic excellence; the tradition that Amiri Baraka says requires that we write something so *baa-a-a-d* they have to ban it.

The Black Arts Movement, the Anti-war Movement, the Women’s Movement—these are the big three that shaped my work as a young artist/activist and that continue to guide my hand today as a gloriously, gratefully, not so young artist/activist...

The process of my self-definition as a writer began during those years. The eager-to-please second child of a politically radical minister who would have preferred a son, but settled for a devoted daughter, I was thrust by my family ties into the intoxicatingly interconnected worlds of the Black Arts Movement and the Black freedom struggle.

My father’s church, The Shrine of the Black Madonna, in Detroit, Michigan, was a popular gathering place for artists, activists, intellectuals, and revolutionaries, and after the excitement of the public meetings, speeches and poetry readings, I often sat spellbound in the corner while my father talked quietly into the night with Malcolm X or Stokely Carmichael or Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee.

Our house was always full of black books and black writers, so that by the time I was ready for college, choosing to be a writer was no more abstract to me than deciding to be a nurse. I saw my writing as the perfect place to pursue my responsibilities as an artist and an activist. *I still do.*

Writers like Amiri Baraka, Don L. Lee, Nikki Giovanni, Mari Evans, Sonia Sanchez, A.B. Spellman, Ed Bullins, Larry Neal,

Toni Cade Bambara, and others too numerous to mention here by name—these writers were the collective literary voice of a diverse black community that was in the throes not only of a dangerous, prolonged, exhausting, active struggle for equal rights and protections under the law, but an equally challenging ideological struggle between those who believed in Dr. King’s philosophy of non-violent civil disobedience and those who identified more closely with Malcolm X’s black nationalist view. The debate was continuous, as were the actions of civil rights workers and community organizers who risked their lives and their sanity to force change on a confused and reluctant America.

The passionate connection between social activism and black literature had never been more obvious. The literary tradition I was raised to embrace is articulated most completely in the words of the late Toni Cade Bambara in her piece, “The Education of a Storyteller.”

“It was Grandma Dorothy who taught me critical theory,” Toni wrote.

Grandma Dorothy who steeped me in the tradition of Afrocentric aesthetic regulations, who trained me to understand that a story should be informed by the emancipatory impulse that characterizes our storytelling trade in these territories as exemplified by those freedom narratives which we’ve been trained to call slave narratives for reason too obscene to mention, as if the “slave” were an identity and not a status interrupted by the very act of fleeing, speaking, writing, and countering the happy-darkey propaganda. She taught that a story should contain mimetic devices so that the tale is memorable, sharable, that a story should be grounded in cultural specificity and shaped by the modes of Black art practice.

Toni said it and I believed it. When I addressed this organization’s conference in Atlanta, eighteen years ago, this is how I opened my remarks...

As a third generation black nationalist and a radical feminist, the primary energy that fuels my work both in and out of the theatre is a determination to be a part of the ongoing worldwide struggle against racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia. I approach my work first as a way of expressing my emotional response to oppression since no revolution has ever been fueled purely by intellect, *no matter what the boys tell you.*

Secondly, as a way to offer analysis, establish context, and clarify point of view.

And third, to incite my audiences, or my readers, to action.

—June 7th, 1994

The tradition I embrace goes back to ancient campfires where we gathered together to share the stories that would bind us as a community of people. It was through our stories, told and retold in every generation, that we defined what a woman was, and how a man should behave and what we would call courage. And in spite of the Nook and the Kindle and the ability to download whole books faster than an author can say copyright infringement, writing those stories is no less relevant, no less critical, no less

necessary in the New America than it ever was in the old one.

There is no denying that we have come a long way since the Sixties, but we are still very much in process. We are still a nation at war. We are still a nation that allows too many of its children to go to sleep at night hungry and cold and sick and scared. In the face of such life and death problems, our challenge is to find a way to continue to believe in the possibility of solutions, of change, of growth, transformation and transcendence. Our challenge as we begin this second decade of the twenty-first century is to find a way to make those beliefs real in our lives and in our stories.

For the last four or five years, my husband, Zaron, has been watching the news of the world and quoting American patriot Tom Paine's famous words: "These are the times that try men's souls." Of course, I pointed out that it's pretty challenging for women, too, and like the well trained feminist that I am, reminded him that Ginger Rogers did everything Fred Astaire did, except she did it backwards and in heels.

He agreed, and then so did I. These are the times that try our souls and our patience and our resources and our sanity and our resolve and our commitment to whatever or whoever we believe in. These are the times that try our *everything*, men and women, young and old, *ready or not*, because this is one of those defining moments in the history of our country that can go one of two ways.

We can continue to embrace violence, meanness, selfishness, self-deception, self-destruction and ignorance, *or* we can begin to consciously embrace and embody the kind of courage and commitment and clarity and compassion that will be required to remake this nation every day, in every way, until it reflects what we know we *can* be if we will just decide once and for all to stop the wars, and feed anybody who's hungry, and make sure everybody has someplace safe to live, and vote every chance we get for the best person we can find, because that's what citizens do.

And that is what we are. *Citizens...free citizens*, who will in the absence of campfires, continue to gather in conferences and classrooms and libraries and lecture halls and coffee shops and theatres and hair salons and grocery stores and book clubs and block clubs and churches and temples and mosques and boardrooms and backyards to figure out how to shape the stories of this new America, *because make no mistake about it*. This is a new America. *A not perfect, but a whole lot better than it was America*. And we are the new Americans, which brings me back to my father.

For me, the most difficult thing President Obama asked me to do was to think of myself as an American. This was a real challenge, especially since I was not raised in America, unless you count the West Side of Detroit, *which we most definitely did not*. My father's passionate belief in Black Nationalism did not allow for such indulgences. I was born into a family of people who took the singing of "The Star Spangled Banner" by Negroes as a sign of insanity. I never actually spelled America, Ameri-KKK-a, as some of my more radical friends did, but I thought about it.

For us, being caught placing a hand over your heart to pledge Allegiance to the American flag was to be guilty of publicly affirm-

ing the place where a few short years and one Civil War ago, our fellow citizens bought and sold and bred us like livestock. My father agreed with Malcolm X, who said, "Just because you're in this country doesn't make you an American."

In our house, separateness was a *fact* and a *challenge*. An obstacle not of our making that we were required to resist, *and resist we did*, politically, culturally, economically, and spiritually. We had summer freedom schools where we learned black history and culture. We had our own red, black, and green flag and our own national anthem, "Lift Every Voice and Sing," written by James Weldon Johnson and set to music by his brother, John Johnson, in 1905.

*Lift every voice and sing,
Till earth and heaven ring,
Ring with the harmony of liberty...*

At our church, we sang it every Sunday morning and by the time I was six, I knew all three verses well enough to sing along without ever having to read the words on the back of the program. I have spent most of my life as an activist, a protestor, a member of the resistance, massing at the gates, demanding my rightful place as a first class citizen. Such a life requires not only discipline and courage, but the cultivation of an outsider point of view that is difficult to overcome, especially since for many years, it seemed to be all that kept us alive. But everything is different when the president looks like family.

And now my sister, writer Alice Walker, is telling me to remember that "*you, yourself, are America*," and since she is incapable of lying, I have to believe her, *and I do*, but in order to understand what that meant, I had to *undo* a lifetime of separateness, of keeping my distance so I wouldn't get stomped on, or pushed back, or cast aside, or worse. How was I going to become an American after all those years of being so vehemently *anti-American*?

I had no idea how to proceed, and although my heart was in the right place, old habits are hard to break and I watched myself stumbling around, grasping at straws, but ultimately, no closer to a way of processing this new reality that Sister Alice was trying to introduce into my consciousness. My stories became strange, sad tales of confusion and regret.

And then, at a moment I was least expecting it, I felt a shifting in my perspective. A crack appeared in my invisible anti-American protective shield. My husband and I, who share an aversion to airplane travel, were driving across the country from Los Angeles to Atlanta, when I caught a glimpse of my first snow-capped mountain. We were coming through Arizona, and suddenly, *there it was!* A real, live *purple mountain majesty*, and it was so beautiful, so just what you want your first mountain to be, that I wept for the beauty of my country, and for her continuing inability to really be the land of the free and the home of the brave. A place where everyone was free to pursue life, liberty, and the possibility of happiness. A place where all people were created equal and were guaranteed a fair shake. Those were the stories I wanted to offer the new America. Stories that could give us a look at the beauty we have just begun to claim.

I was so moved that I wept my way through Arizona and most of New Mexico. After all, this was 2005, and George W. Bush was

still in the White House. Tears were not a completely inappropriate response, but all that was about to change. During our time in California, we had met a young senator from Chicago who people said was thinking about running for president. Even though at first I couldn't really wrap my mind around the idea that this young man could win, and even though I immediately felt protective of his wife, since being a politician's wife is not necessarily the easiest fit for a strong, smart, independent woman, all of which she clearly was, *I still hoped he would go for it.*

Wiping away tears as I watched an amazing sunset from our motel parking lot, somewhere just outside of Amarillo, Texas, I thought if that smart, young senator was in the White House, maybe I could figure out a way to be a real American writer after all.

And, of course, he did run. And he won, which means that a majority of my fellow Americans agreed with me that he was the best person for the job, and he is, and our first lady is doing just fine, thank you, which means she's even smarter and stronger than I thought she was, but where does that leave me, a newly minted citizen writer with irrefutable evidence that my country is no longer the same place it was fifty years ago, or forty, or thirty, or twenty, or ten, or *yesterday.*

The history of America is undeniably a blood soaked catalogue of oppression, slavery, violence, trickery, child abuse, class exploitation, racial segregation and repeated attempts to steal as much of the world's resources as we can get our hands on. But it is also the story of good Americans of all races, religions, classes, and political persuasions, trying passionately to *get it right.* The Civil War; the Abolitionist Movement; Women's Suffrage; the Labor Movement; the Civil Rights Movement; the anti-War Movement; *La Raza*; the Women's Liberation Movement; the Gay Rights Movement; the hunger strikes; the sit-ins; the Freedom Rides; Occupy Wall Street; the takeovers and boycotts and mass meetings. *It never stops!* Democracy is a messy, ongoing business, but when it works, it's as beautiful as that snowcapped mountain that moved me to tears, and as rare.

But I am an optimist. I am, after all, part of a generation that stopped a legally sanctioned reign of terror against black Americans who wanted to vote, or ride the bus, or see a movie. A generation that ended an unjust conflict in Southeast Asia. A generation that guaranteed a woman's right to choose, not only when and whether to bear children, but what kind of work she will do as a peaceful and productive citizen of the planet. We got a Voting Rights Act passed in 1965 and forty-three years after that, we wept at how completely that historic moment was reflected in the election of Barack Hussein Obama.

There is only one struggle in which we are all engaged and it is the struggle to bring our national behavior in line with the beautifully written documents upon which the country is founded:

We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal.

If you have ever doubted the power of words, you should re-read some of those documents. You'll be surprised at how concise they are. How they go straight to the heart of the matter. How the passion of the writing comes through in the words they chose to declare their freedom, and our own.

We hold these truths to be self-evident...

Of course, we know that their definition of "men" was limited to white male property owners, but that doesn't make the words ring false. It just makes us know that these men who wrote such passionate words in defense of their new country were not perfect beings. Some of them were slave owners who had made their fortunes off the unpaid labor of other human beings they bought and sold like chattel, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson among them. *But their idea was sound.* Their idea was noble and courageous and visionary. Which is why it's still working today, in spite of the best efforts of some of our frightened, angry fellow citizens to slow the nation's forward motion and deny the reality of a new, multi-cultural, multi-colored, multi-ethnic America.

But in order for that America—*our America*—to work; in order for this new story to be told, we need more than a great president. We need the active involvement of informed citizens and that's you and me! That's each and every one of us. We have to stay engaged and energized and present in the life of our country.

Dr. Martin Luther King called upon us to recognize "the fierce urgency of now," and to embrace the fact that "now is the time to make real the promise of democracy." That is the challenge facing us at this critical moment; to make real the promise of democracy. This is the moment when we have to define the global community in a way that looks not just at the speed of communication, but at the quality of the thought behind it. This is the moment when we have to protect the earth from humans, and for humans, because it's the only home we've got.

This is the moment when we have to find a way to eliminate the hyphenated Americans- African-Americans, European-Americans, Mexican-Americans, Gay-Americans. Our challenge is to stir the famous American melting pot one more time so we can all simply be *Americans.*

We are the ones who have to find a new story and a new song that we can all lift our voices to sing; a new national narrative that weaves all our stories together into one amazing story that we can first tell each other, and then our children, and their children, and the ones who come after, and the ones who come after that.

Because those stories—our stories!—are what we leave behind to tell the future who we were and what we valued in ourselves and in our neighbors. Historians can tell you what happened and when, but writers are the ones who can tell you how it felt to be there. And how it feels to be right *here*, right now.

Adding our voices to that national story is my job and my joy. So when people ask me what I do for a living, I let Langston Hughes explain

*Life is a big sea,
Full of many fish,
I let down my nets,
and pull.*

Thank you.

Michael Mark Chemers’ *Ghost Light: An Introductory Handbook for Dramaturgy*

reviewed by Jane Barnette
and Jules Odendahl-James

“*Ghost Light* is an introductory handbook for the art and science of dramaturgy specifically as it is practiced in the American theater.”

—Michael Mark Chemers (*Ghost Light* xi)

“There are a lot of urban legends about the origins of ghost lights: my personal favorite is that they were originally left onstage to propitiate (or abjure) the ghosts that were known to congregate in theaters where the metaphysical barriers between this world and the next are notoriously thin.”

—Michael Mark Chemers (*Ghost Light* 9)

JSB: Of the handful of recent dramaturgy textbook publications, I was first drawn to Chemers’ *Ghost Light* because I found his YouTube video clip “What is Dramaturgy?” to be so helpful to my work mentoring student dramaturgs at Kennesaw State University. This semester, it is our primary textbook for the Dramaturgy course for the first time. As the founder/director of Carnegie Mellon’s BFA in Dramaturgy, Chemers draws from his experience as an administrator, professor, and professional/university dramaturg.¹

JOJ: I found *Ghost Light* after being tasked with suggesting new dramaturgical texts for our library at the same time I had a new set of students interested in the practice within a liberal arts context. 2010 was a good year for U.S. dramaturgy publishing with *The Process of Dramaturgy: A Handbook* by Scott R. Irelan, Anne Fletcher and Julie Felise Dubiner and *The Art of Active Dramaturgy: Transforming Critical Thought into Dramatic Action* by Lenora Inez Brown joining *Ghost Light* as the first book-length texts exploring dramaturgy pedagogy in the U.S. theatrical context since *Dramaturgy in American Theater: A Sourcebook* edited by Geoffrey Proehl, Michael Lupu and Susan Jonas (1996).

JSB: Chemers’ previous book, *Staging Stigma: A Critical History of the American Freak Show* (Palgrave 2008) is, in compel-



PHOTO: ANDREW EDWARDS
PHOTOGRAPHY

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culture and American pageantry. She has published reviews and articles in *Theatre Journal*, *Theatre Symposium*, *Theatre InSight*, and *TPQ*. Barnette serves as LMDA’s Regional Vice President for the Southeast, and was the conference co-chair (with Celise Kalke of the Alliance Theatre) for the 2012 LMDA conference in Atlanta. For examples of her dramaturgical websites, see: <http://www.kennesaw.edu/theatre/dramaturgySites.shtml>



PHOTO: JULES ODENDAHL-JAMES

JULES ODENDAHL-JAMES, the Resident Dramaturg at Duke University, is a scholar/artist whose research focuses on the intersections between forensic and documentary media

in regard to affective truths and cultures of memorialization. She has published work in *Crime, Media, Culture*, *Theater Survey*, *Text and Performance Quarterly* among others and on *HowlRound* and *In Media Res*. She currently serves as the editor of the LMDA Bibliography and welcomes citations for that document, especially for examples of digiturgy or dramaturgy in the digital realm. For examples of her work please visit <http://julesoj.com>

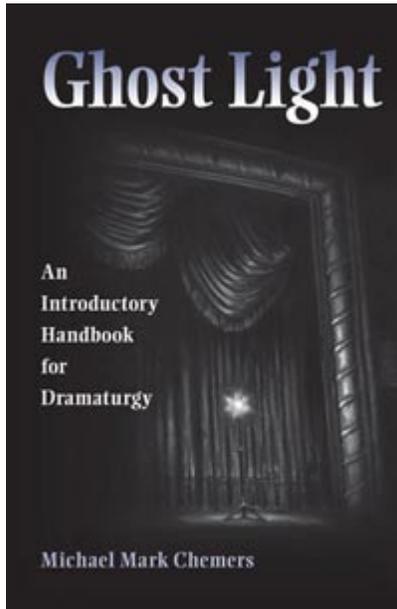
ling ways, in conversation with this textbook, insofar as the dramaturg tends to occupy a marginal/outside position in American theatre. Within the “Theater in the Americas” series published by Southern Illinois University Press, *Ghost Light* is somewhat freakish as well—there are only two other books in this series with a pedagogical bent (*Teaching Performance Studies* and *Words at Play*) and only two books overall (*Ghost Light* and *Words at Play*) with a dramaturgical focus.

JOJ: I’m fascinated by the ways the theory/practice divide gets played out in dramaturgical writing and publishing. To my mind, dramaturgy is one of the few places in our discipline where theory and practice are indivisible. I cannot *do* dramaturgy without understanding the theoretical underpinnings of narrative structure, historiography, audience reception, aesthetic periods, and the list goes on. It is Chemers’ image of the dramaturg as creator—informed by intellect and forged in action based out of that intellect—that most appealed to me both as the way I want my students to understand what I do *and* the way I want them to create, engage, and interrogate dramaturgy.

As much as my students gobble up the text’s functional connections between dramaturgy and pedagogy (for example, how to craft a Study Guide, run a talk-back with outside artists/experts, “teach” lessons about X historical time and Y playwright’s body of work), *Ghost Light* insists that *being* a dramaturg is much more than simply knowing how to *do* dramaturgical tasks. Whether scholarly readers will identify *Ghost Light* as an example of critical pedagogy for the dramaturg remains to be seen. Certainly, my undergraduate students see it in that way. The only flip side to that achievement is that students tend to gloss over the more theoretical sections of the book, looking for concrete examples and details to emulate or evaluate.

JSB: That’s one of the reasons why I designed one of our four short projects to cover Chemers’ “Theory Capsules.” After an initial introductory day about the power of theory in theatre (for which I assigned both “Drama as Dialectic” from *Ghost Light* and the third chapter of *Process of Dramaturgy*, “Conceptual Frameworks”), I divided the theory capsules portion of Chemers’ third chapter (“Power Plays”) into two parts. As part of that assignment, each student created a short presentation for the class (featuring images and/or videos) to explicate each of the practitioners mentioned in passing by Chemers, with the goal of better unpacking why and how this “theory capsule” can be seen in that practitioner’s work. Then each student created a Prezi summarizing the theory capsule overall (including all the practitioners listed). This short project—including both the in-class mini-presentation and the Prezi—was peer-reviewed as well as evaluated by me, allowing for multiple layers of feedback and a more nuanced understanding of the complexity potentially hidden in this vital part of Chemers’ book.

I want to return to the notion of being a dramaturg rather than doing dramaturgy later, but while we’re on the topic of potential



pitfalls of using this textbook in an undergraduate course, I noticed that several of the metaphors used in the book favor a masculine tone. For example, he explains his focus on the German Enlightenment with reference to the “muscular, cross-disciplinary approach” it allows; he advocates using theory and history both in dramaturgy because “the dramaturg’s intellectual arsenal must contain shots from both of these lockers” (xiv, 45). For the most part, this seems authentic, given the author’s gender and perspective, but there’s also residue of an attempt to transform readers’ assumptions from their likely association of dramaturgy as service (and thus, feminine or “women’s work”) with a robust, virile image of dramaturgy as powerful and worthy theatre practice.

JOJ: Interestingly, this question of “feminization” came up in a Twitter #dramaturgy thread just a couple of weeks ago. In that context, there was resistance by some posters who felt such a characterization was unhelpful and overly broad and other posters who argued this was a palpable attitude held by collaborators. Ultimately, both groups agreed that such an impression didn’t change the rigor of dramaturgical work, whether done by men or women, but could influence how that work is valued and within the various contexts in which dramaturgs circulate.

I wonder what happens if we see that masculine construction in *Ghost Light* as connected to Chemers’ decision to focus on the “German model [of] dramaturgy.” That choice produces two additional effects. The first is to present the dramaturg as a specific, uniquely trained and attuned theatre artist. While conversant in a wide array of performance theories, narrative structures, and historical periods, the dramaturg in this model is not interchangeable with critic, playwright or historian. As Chemers’ text illustrates, dramaturgy (broadly conceived) comprises sets of research, writing, and outreach practices available equally to all theater artists; however, unique among those artists, the dramaturg must be able to communicate with artists, academics, and audiences with equal clarity. As a result, her intellect and insights must be sharp and flexible, skills only achieved through dramaturgy-explicit training and practice.

JSB: This same holistic and wide-ranging training is one of the main reasons that dramaturgically-inclined students are among the most hireable in our major. One of the glaring omissions in this text is the concept of transferable skills—the fact that the skills learned during dramaturgy can also be applied in an array of fields, including grant writing/development, public relations and marketing, consulting, education, and several arenas of graduate study. Because dramaturgs (should) excel at collaboration, connectivity, and communication, they can transfer these skills outside of theatre production as needed. But I interrupted you—what’s the second effect of Chemers’ use of the German model?

JOJ: The second effect is to present production structure as resolutely hierarchical with the Artistic Director at the head of the theater

company and the Production Director at the head of the rehearsal process. It is here where the well-ordered structuralism of the German model of dramaturgy falls short when met with the specifics of American dramaturgical practice. In the German model the dramaturg is on par with the artistic director (wouldn't that be nice!), both crafting and placing an institution's artistic philosophies into social and aesthetic contexts. In America, the driving forces behind institutional development tend to be financial before dramaturgical, even in the non-profit theater world. As for academic institutions, it is more likely, but not certain, that curricular interests are inherently dramaturgical. Does the presentation of dramaturgy as a unique and essential artistic position within American theatrical institutions create false expectations for our students?

JSB: Perhaps; but in so doing, it also creates fertile ground for imagining a new model of dramaturgy. My students were inspired by this approach, as it helped them envision a brighter future for the power of dramaturgy in theatre production.

JOJ: Also, while the most practical advice Chemers gives to budding American dramaturgs is to learn deference to the director, the playwright, the institution, and the audience, is that the best advice for a profession which still has to fight for its equal place at the artistic table? In Chemers' "Part Three: Practice" I found myself reacting with discomfort as I do to study guide pages that inculcate young people into "proper" theater behavior. I recognize that an introductory text is not necessarily the time or place to radicalize dramaturgical practice, but I found myself wondering what kind of innovation is necessarily forestalled when a dramaturg's creativity is tempered by a constant awareness of her "place" in and dependence upon hierarchical structures of power.

JSB: I agree and confess that I shared that same discomfort, although at this stage (at least until/unless Chemers' predictions of dramaturgy being as ubiquitous as directing come true), I think it's worth the risk. Because the reality is that American theatre—especially within the university setting—is hierarchical. Given that dramaturgy tends to attract students from disciplines outside of theatre, it's also wise to include expected decorum in a textbook aimed at undergraduates.

JOJ: A wonderfully productive feature of Chemers' organizational structure, which layers historiography, theory, and practice, is the way it constructs *production* dramaturgy as foundational to new play dramaturgy. Perhaps this is the result of the book's anticipated undergraduate student audience who is less likely to work in new play development. It is also a connection I would like to see Chemers explore to greater effect (beyond encouraging the use of "Goethe's 3" to identify structural elements in both established and emerging texts). Maybe in a follow-up book? It might temper the reliance upon hierarchy and directorial vision and offer different models for collaboration to the next generation of theater artists.

JSB: Good point. While I appreciated the revisionist approach to historicizing dramaturgy (reclaiming several pre-Lessing figures as ur-dramaturgs), I was disappointed that Appendix B did not include *History of Theatre* in its "theatre history" section. I reckon I should avoid judging Chemers by the tyranny of completeness

that I choose to avoid in my own history/theory courses, but it's hard to imagine learning the history of theatre without referencing Brockett.

JOJ: Perhaps this desire is the result of our appreciation of the way Brockett *taught* history and theory as intertwined with dramaturgy? I confess that I found/find his textbooks rather dry and factual, not at all representative (except maybe in breadth and depth) of the ways in which he actualized that history through his teaching. Maybe we need the dramaturg's companion to *History of Theatre* (and, for that matter, many other such history textbooks) that could bring to life his understanding of how Theater encompasses so many living, breathing, changing practices over time?

JSB: Hmm... I may be in the minority opinion here, but I never really enjoyed Brockett's teaching style in the history classroom *per se*; instead, most of the learning I cherished was *liminal*—it happened in his office, or in the hallway, or in social settings, informally and conversationally. (Arguably, this is also the way that my own dramaturgy tends to function, within a university setting as I work with colleagues who are as pressed for time and energy as I am.) That said, the way Brockett taught the dramatic *theory* class (using Dukore's *Dramatic Theory and Criticism*) was outstanding. Your point about the intrinsically dramaturgical approach that Brock typically took is spot-on, and something I didn't recognize until a few years into my post as resident dramaturg at Kennesaw State University.

Given this observation, perhaps it is not surprising that of all the chapters in this book, the most useful to me thus far has been Chemers' aforementioned third chapter, "Power Plays," which contains several theory "capsules" and does an admirable job summarizing dramatic theory. We spent a week and a half on this chapter this term, and it provided the scaffolding I needed to move into the less familiar and more rigorous territory of place-based scholarship.

JOJ: On page 43, in his discussion of the historical criticism theory "capsule," Chemers argues that historical research is "the cornerstone of humanistic inquiry for the simple reason that *history is identity*" (emphasis his). He goes on:

History is, after all, presentable only as a series of stories that communities tell about their origins and developments, triumphs and struggles, and together these create a sense of the society and the individual's role within it.

I'm stuck on this passage because it expresses (perhaps unwittingly) Chemers' approach to introducing the field of dramaturgy. It also speaks to the inevitable gaps, absences, and abbreviations that plague "introductory" texts.

JSB: Can you expand on this thought? Is your concern that he uses the identity lens to the exclusion of other approaches, or that he forces a naming/claiming approach?

JOJ: I cite this moment not for critique but the productive way I want to see Chemers' writing *about* dramaturgy as inherently *dramaturgical*. This quote seemed to exemplify how a dramaturg's mindset and practices, her identity if you will, is directly con-

nected to the varied histories of dramaturgical practice and theory in the American theater. Around this quote, Chemers talks about the importance of historical research to the practice of dramaturgy, how a dramaturg should read history (both of theater practices and of specific scripts) with her eye firmly trained on its narrative construction and her understanding that all histories are necessarily partial. It seems important that we read Chemers' text itself with this fact in mind. How undramaturgical would it be to hold the text up as definitive or, conversely, criticize its exclusions as failure.

The "New Plays" chapter, however, seems decidedly thin considering the tremendously difficult craft of developing new work. Also, by sandwiching discussions of devised, documentary, and adaptation dramaturgy within that chapter, Chemers short-changes all three domains. I was never more aware of the absence of a topic—translation as dramaturgy/dramaturging translated scripts—as I was in this chapter.

JSB: This observation is all the more surprising given the fact that Chemers (along with J.A. Ball) has translated/adapted Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, and that he holds an MFA in playwriting.

JOJ: I wonder if it's more productive to turn this critique into a observation that Chemers might use in his next book proposal: there's a desire for more full-length studies about specific aspects of dramaturgical praxis such as translation, adaptation, collaborative devising, digiturgy, among others.

JSB: Whether taken by Chemers or others, the time is certainly ripe for continuing and expanding the conversation about dramaturgy in higher education, both stateside and throughout the Americas. Your attraction to Chemers' holistic approach to dramaturgy (how to be a dramaturg rather than doing dramaturgy) seems especially worthy of further exploration, given my current research. Appropriately enough, over the course of our collaboration for this review I've come to realize just how liminal dramaturgy is—a fact that Chemers both recognizes (with his overall metaphor of dramaturgy as the "ghost light" in theatre) and ignores (in his deference to hierarchy and decorum in his eighth chapter, "The Company").

Recently, I've been exploring the connections between body/mind/spirit and pedagogy—this same yogic lens seems appropriate for rethinking dramaturgy: a kind of yogaturgy, if you will. Even without this specific focus, as I mentioned earlier I'm fascinated by the promise of transferable skills inherent in good dramaturgy. How can training in dramaturgy better prepare social activists, museum designers, and entrepreneurs? My students would find a textbook exploring these questions intriguing, as would I.

JOJ: As would I! Ultimately, no one book can address every nook and cranny of "the garden of forking paths" (one of Chemers' much loved metaphors) that is American dramaturgy. As his imagined audience is the undergraduate student in their first and possibly only dramaturgy course, Chemers errs on the side of weaving dramaturgical practices into the warp and weft of American theater's historiographical, theoretical and professional trajectories. Such an approach, for better or worse, urges these two readers, instructors of said students' one/only dramaturgy course, to probe the book's own dramaturgical boundaries, to "go deep," "go wide," and "go long," just as the exercises at the end of each chapter encourage our students to do.

NOTES

1. Starting in the 2012-13 academic year, Chemers will be an Associate Professor at UC-Santa Cruz, where he will teach courses in dramaturgy and theatre history/literature/theory.

Creative Process in Theatrical Translation: An Interview with Adam Versényi

by Hector Garza

Hector Garza: What was your rationale behind starting *The Mercurian*¹? What do you hope to accomplish?

Adam Versényi: The initial impulse for it was that, with the demise of *Modern International Drama*—about 10 years ago now—there was no longer any place dedicated specifically to the publication of theatrical translations. I published in that a couple of times, and knew a number of people who had, and had found it be a very useful resource. At the same time, it also seemed to me like it was rather limited. *Modern International Drama* would have two translations in each issue. So I was looking at that and thinking, okay I want to publish theatrical translations, but I also want to provide a space for people to think about issues related to theatrical translation; that was very important to me. Also that it not only be theatre but performance pieces as well. I am sure you've seen in the submission criteria that we'll publish anything having to do with this area of translation: theoretical articles, production histories, position papers, rants, manifestos.

I think theatrical translation has really only recently become something that people are paying attention to in an important way. It is by no means as widespread a kind of attention as both of us would like, but there is increasing thought being paid. And the other thing was that particularly for my field, Latin American Theatre, is that when I began to translate Latin American Theatre in the early 80s there were few if any people working on Latin American Theatre, coming out of theatre studies. They were all coming out of language and literature departments and the result had been that for quite a number of years any Latin American theatre that was translated tended to be translated by people who knew nothing about the theatre and the work was pretty much unplayable. We are now increasingly in the situation, in terms of Latin America, where that is no longer the case. I can think of half a dozen people off the top of my head who are doing translations of Latin American Theatre.

ADAM VERSÉNYI is the Milly S. Barranger Distinguished Term Professor of Dramatic Art and Dramaturg for PlayMakers Repertory Company. His translations of Argentine playwrights Agustín Cuzzani and Griselda Gambaro, and Mexican playwright Sabina Berman have been performed at HERE Arts Center, Florida Studio Theatre, and a number of colleges and universities. A theatre scholar, dramaturg, critic, translator and director, he is the author of *Theatre in Latin America: Religion, Politics, and Culture From Cortés to the 1980s* (Cambridge University Press) and *The Theatre of Sabina Berman: The Agony of Ecstasy and Other Plays* (Southern Illinois University Press), among others. He has written widely on Latin American theatre, U.S. Latino/a theatre, dramaturgy, theatre production, and theatrical translation. He is the founder and editor of *The Mercurian: A Theatrical Translation Review*, an on-line journal, which, since 2007 has published ten issues containing forty-four plays and a series of articles concerning theatre in translation from seventeen different countries. Dramaturg for PlayMakers Repertory Company since 1988, he has also worked at Yale Repertory Theatre, Florida Studio Theatre, New York Shakespeare Festival, and La Mama E.T.C, as well as other regional theatres and universities, both nationally and internationally. He received his B.A. in the Combined Major in Literature in English and Spanish from Yale College, and his M.F.A. and D.F.A. in Dramaturgy and Dramatic Criticism from the Yale School of Drama.

Adam
Versényi



So with *The Mercurian* I wanted it to be a space where you could both get access to theatrical translations and a place for thinking about the nature of theatrical translations. The way that *The Mercurian* works I will publish translations from any language from the world into English and that is another important aspect of it for me. I'm not quite sure what the statistics are at the moment, but the percentage of translations into English from other theatres, other literatures, for that matter, the stuff that gets published, is tiny. We have no tradition of translation in the United States. You know, part of that is understandable. We are a huge country. I think the latest statistic is that 70% of U.S. citizens do not possess a passport.

HG: With *The Mercurian* are you looking to break down some of those walls so that it is more acceptable to bring in plays from other places; in terms of creating a diverse canon within what we consider worthy of being produced?

AV: Absolutely. If you talk to playwrights in Europe, or in Latin America for that matter, they will talk about their own art and their own artistic process as being influenced by, challenged by, theatre from other places in addition to their own. It always seems to me that the more theatre is happening, the more theatre will happen. Imposing restrictions is ultimately self-defeating. You cut your own throat that way. This also may come out of my own background. My father came to the States from Hungary in 1949 and, as a Hungarian, since nobody other than Hungarians speak Hungarian, he spoke 8 other languages. And my mother was born in Brooklyn and raised speaking Yiddish as her first language. So it was very important to my parents that my sister and I at least knew one other language, they didn't care what it was. We know that really becoming fluent in another language means that you see things differently, you think in a different way. By the same token, trans-

lating theatre from another language into English gives us new perspectives and new ways of seeing, of being, of creating.

HG: I know the purview of *The Mercurian* is to translate into English, but have you thought about publishing in other languages, for the sake of the original? In *The Mercurian* all we see is the target, how do we open up more of an opportunity to see the source for what it is?

AV: There certainly are publications of things that are purposefully bilingual, so that the reader can look from one to the other. Another motivation for *The Mercurian* in general that I didn't mention earlier comes out of my frustration with getting my own translations into U.S. theatres. Another definite thrust for the journal is publishing things in order to move them to production. So in that regard doing bilingual translations, which I think can be more of a scholarly kind of endeavor, perhaps, is not the direction I wanted to take the journal. Not that there isn't value to doing that. Somebody is sitting down to translate, depending upon the piece, might want to look at previously existing translation. I prefer to work from the source all of the time, rather than somebody else's take upon it.

HG: As I looked through some of the processes for translating featured in *The Mercurian*, Andy Bragen's translation of *Vengeance Can Wait*² stands out. He admits that he does not know Japanese. He had to depend on somebody else to do a literal translation, so that he could translate it for the stage. The question that I want to ask is: Who can translate? What is the appropriate level of familiarity with source?

AV: Another aspect of *The Mercurian* is that it speaks to this and goes to what the structure of the Theatrical Translation as

Creative Process: A Conference/Festival³ was all about. With the journal I wanted to open up a space for talking about the nature of theatrical translation. I also didn't want to close down the definition of theatrical translation. I think there are as many different ways of translating as there are translators.

From my own practice of translation it seems to me there is a continuum. Working on Latin American theatre I am frequently the first person translating something into English. And, therefore, I feel like I have a responsibility to hew as closely to the original as I can. Particularly for publication, it might be different if I am in a rehearsal hall and I'm thinking only about production. I mean, for instance, and I may have mentioned this to you before, I think I actually put it into the introduction to my collection of Sabina Berman translations.⁴ There is a section in *El suplicio del placer* called *La casa chica* that I translated as *The Love Nest*. In that little playlet there is a Mexican businessman and this woman and he spends the whole piece alternately haranguing this woman who is slowly dressing herself to go out, and talking on his phone to his wife and his fourteen-year-old daughter. By the end of the piece you realize that the woman in the room with him is a prostitute and this is the way she titillates him, by delaying being ready. At the end of it he falls into her lap headfirst screaming, "I love my daughter. I love my wife." And as he does so he crosses himself.

So in early 2000 and something, Kirsten Nigro, who was then at the University of Cincinnati, did a festival conference called *Un Escenario Propio*, A Stage of their Own, on female Spanish and Latin American playwrights and asked me to come and direct a staged reading of *The Agony of Ecstasy*, which I did. Sabina was there and afterwards we were talking and she said: "Well the U.S. isn't a Catholic country. Why don't you..." This was right around the time when Jimmy Swaggart and all of these Moral Majority preachers were being discovered having affairs with prostitutes, both male and female. And she said, "Well, why don't you change it, to one of those preachers. Make the male in this piece like that?" And my response was, once the play has been translated, once that first translation has been done, once it's been published; then that would be a wonderful thing for a director to do. It would take it further in terms of the production, but that I didn't feel comfortable doing that now. And I guess what I am saying is, is that there is this kind of continuum it seems to me. That if you're translating something for the first time, you don't want to, or I wouldn't want to, go toward adaptation. If, once it's been translated, once that translation exists, then I am thinking in terms of production, then there are further steps that I might want to take. And in the case of something like *Vengeance Can Wait*, you know I don't remember if Andy talked about the whole background of how that translation came about. But I am assuming that there was something about the original Japanese that attracted him.

One of the best pieces of theatre I can remember ever seeing was in the mid-70s at La Mama, it was a Persian theatre company. I didn't understand a bloody word but I can still remember that experience. So, if in this case something like that occurred and you want to find a way of recreating that experience but you yourself don't know the source language, then working from a kind of

inter-text, a literal translation, makes sense to me. Provided that everyone involved is thinking theatrically. You know, the other big example of this I published in *The Mercurian* is Libby Appel and Allison Horsely's Chekhov translations.⁵ There you've got an extremely experienced director and a very experienced dramaturg working jointly. Allison is doing a literal translation but if you look at her literal translation, in fact, it's not just a literal translation. I was just teaching both their translations of *Seagull* and *Uncle Vanya*. I gave the students Allison's literal translations to look at alongside the finished translation because what she does in the literal translation is rather than close down the translation she opens it up. She doesn't give Libby her idea of how it ought to be translated, what the literal rendition is, rather she frequently provides 4, 5, 6 different possible meanings for a given word. Or she will put into parentheses something having to do with the cultural meaning of that particular saying. So it is not simply providing Libby with the dialogue, it is a much more ample vision of the Russian.

HG: That's great. Talk to me about instances where you knew that I am not necessarily going to get a production but I still need to translate this play. And how that differed from other processes where you knew you were going to get a chance to work with the translation in the rehearsal space. Are there marked differences between the two and your work as the translator as you sit down to do that work?

AV: I've never actually had the experience of working that way. Well, no, that's not true. Everything that I've translated I've begun on my own. This is a piece of material I love, I want it to have a wider audience, I am going to translate it. And I want to get it produced, ultimately. So when I'm translating, however, even if it's me alone in the room I am constantly moving back and forth between different perspectives: translator, dramaturg, director, actor, teacher. I am moving back and forth between all of those hats; so in a certain sense there is more than one person in the room. And then by no means do I consider anything that I translate to be finished until I've heard it in actors' mouths in some fashion; whether that is just getting a bunch of actors together and having them read it for me, doing a staged reading, or whatever it might be because you discover so much when you hear the language that you don't necessarily find when you're only hearing it in your mind.

The one experience that I've had of working on a translation beyond that—the *TJ* article⁶ that I published goes into this in much more detail—was taking my translation of Griselda Gambaro's *Bitter Blood*⁷ to Florida Studio Theatre and we did a workshop there for a couple of weeks because the director, Richard Hopkins, was concerned—he loved the play—but he was concerned that it was too Argentine and that it wouldn't read for U.S. audiences. Part of that is that it is very much a play that comes out of the *grotesco criollo* tradition. We don't have a tradition of the grotesque in the U.S. So we did two things: one was to say to the cast, okay, the closest that we've got that I can think of to the style in which this play needs to be done is Charles Addams cartoons; the actual cartoons of the Addams family, not the TV show, not the movie. So we plastered the walls with those. You know, it's Christmas and there are a bunch of carolers outside of the Addams Family's falling down mansion and they're up on the roof tipping over a caul-

dron of boiling oil. You know, it is both terrible and hysterically funny at the same time. And that's what the *grotesco criollo* tries to capture. So that was one way we tried to imbue the play in production with qualities that wouldn't be there otherwise. The other thing that we did was that we had a composer in residence and he worked to underscore the entire piece musically. The idea was that, depending upon the music, the audience would get aural cues as to when it was appropriate to laugh and when it wasn't.

But see, that's another difference between translating for publication and thinking about it in terms of production. As we do with any other piece, whether it's, I don't know, Sam Shepard, Suzan-Lori Parks, Genet, Chekhov, when we are in the rehearsal hall we are looking for ways to get this thing alive. And I think in terms of my own practice if I am working on a piece I've translated in rehearsal I am going to shift more towards the dramaturgical hat or the directorial hat and I am going to become much more concerned with how do I generate meaning in performance than, is this the right word? Here?

HG: I really want to parse the difference between all the "hats" that you were talking about: director, dramaturg... can we look at the translator as playwright? What are those different hats and what do they bring to the table? Or, how is it different, in terms of how we look at the translation from those different points of view?

AV: Interesting question. I guess it's another kind of continuum. The translator is trying to find the most effective vehicle to convey what's in the source language in the target language, which may or may not be a one-to-one correspondence. So you take that step, or, I take that step and then, when I'm translating, my initial pass is always a very rapid, dirty translation. I translate that first pass without use of dictionaries or any kind of aids. It's just "what am I getting immediately?" and if I run across words or phrases that I don't feel that I've got a hold of, I just leave them in the Spanish and then move on. Then I'll go back and investigate those places where I didn't catch it immediately. So it feels to me that what I'm beginning to do at that point is moving into a more dramaturgical world: "What's the meaning here?" And, I think something that dramaturgs are primarily concerned with is "how is the meaning of this text conveyed and performed?" So that's another step, and it's a crucial step for the theatrical translator to have in the mind as he or she is translating. And that, inevitably, then enters into directorial and actorial consideration. The very process of translating a piece of theatre necessarily brings you into contact with each of these different kinds of roles.

HG: Is there a difference when you, yourself, are directing something that you translated, and when you hand it off to somebody else to direct? Is there a difference in how that process works?

AV: Certainly. If I am directing one of my own pieces, you kind of have to trick yourself, because you know what went into creating the translation. I'm going to pick the thing up and look at it as a director as if it's somebody else's piece. Okay, now, how does this get into performance? How is it conveyed to the audience? And the rest of the stuff has to fall away.

HG: And, when you hand it off to somebody, what is then your work that still needs to be done in that space?

AV: I think it's much more a dramaturgical role, you know? As I will be doing in a week or so for a production at PlayMakers, something we're calling *The Making of a King*⁸ that we've taken from Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2*, combined them into a single evening and they'll play in rep with *Henry V* with the same cast in both. So in that case, and, for instance, in the case of *Bitter Blood* at Florida Studio Theatre, I'm working on the shows as a dramaturg. I think the dramaturgical aspect becomes more important than the translator aspect at that point. It leans over into the teacher role, too. Answering questions, clarifying things for the actors, the director, the designers, providing them with a cultural context from which to create this work. There are things that are inevitably not going to appear in the text itself, but need to be fleshed out in some way for this to truly work in performance and convey what the actor and the playwright in the source wanted to convey. And you always make, again, regardless of whether you're working on Büchner or Shakespeare or Will Eno, inevitably you're going to make choices as to what you're going to express in this particular production.

HG: Going back to something you said earlier, and I was thinking to myself, "This is what we do as directors." You know, when you present the translation, finished or not, it's going to have a tolerance, right? All plays have tolerance of what they can support and what they cannot support, right? With translation it's the same process but more reverence has to be paid to the source in that moment because it is malleable in the target because I can choose a different word, because I can change the phrase, but yet, you still can't, you still have to live within the tolerance of what the playwright intended. The idea of a continuum has come up a couple times and it would be interesting for me to hear you talk about when does a translation become an adaptation? Parsing: "Is this a translation?" "Is this a trans-adaptation?" "Is this an adaptation?" Is there value in parsing the difference between a translation and trans-adaptation and when does it become an adaptation where not even, where we're just using an echo of the original, or the source?

AV: I think that it is a continuum. I'm thinking about an instance a number of years ago when there was an undergraduate production of Strindberg's *Miss Julie* here at UNC. A student that I had in several classes directed it and he did it in such a way that it was highly performative and magical, but the play sort of got lost in it all. And my initial reaction upon watching that was "Well, if he wanted to do his own piece, why didn't he do that?" You know, to use Strindberg as the springboard for creating something different, rather than trying to squash something different onto Strindberg. That seems to me, to be quite different than, for instance, Jean Graham-Jones' translation—I don't know what you would call it—of Ricardo Monti's *Finlandia* where she takes the original but re-works it. She's working closely with Monti and was given his permission to do this but, she really writes anew—she doesn't think that the way that the play was written for an Argentine audience was going to be comprehensible to a US-English audience. So, she was given his permission to both translate and to adapt, to create a piece that would have the same essence and spirit of the original but it's been formed in the target language. And that, to me, is still a translation. You're not using the same language, even necessarily the same images or the same characters, but, if you read Monti's play and then read what she's done, they're different, but they're the same play.

Which is a very, very different thing than the *Miss Julie* that I was just talking about.

HG: As a translator, I consider myself an artist, but, the consensus, it seems to me, especially in academia, is that translation is a craft and not an art. What do you think?

AV: That notion is changing. Slowly, but it's changing. Translation is becoming more valued. I'm lucky to be in a department where one of the things that helped me move from associate to full professor was my collection of Sabina Berman translations—precisely because people are looking at them as theatre and part of a creative process. I absolutely think that the translator is as much of a creator as the playwright, the source playwright. And my translation is my work, ultimately. I copyright it, the original playwright doesn't. At the same time, it's also the original playwright's. In the same way you do a production of *The Cherry Orchard* and it's both Chekhov and whoever the company is. Neither one owns it exclusively.

HG: To whom are we most ethically responsible: the original playwright, to the target audience, or to our own artistic sensibilities?

AV: It can change and shift, depending upon the project or the nature of the piece. That is one aspect when we were talking earlier about it—the different “hats”—what we left out was the audience. And, for me, it is equally what you were just saying: translation is always a two-way street. The same way that, again, even if it's a US, English-based playwright, I'm going to have the best experience as an audience member if there's something that challenges me, that demands that I join the world of the play, rather than sit back and observe it in some fashion that's seamless, that it comes to me. Particularly when you're translating from another culture, it seems to me, that one of the crucial aspects of the value of doing that is that we as audience members have to enter that culture. If there isn't anything intriguing, odd, perhaps slightly off-kilter, then the translation, it seems to me, has failed. If you can sit there and take it in like you would a television comedy, then what's the point?

HG: I totally agree with you. It is that sense of, if we are to begin to start living in a global world, we as US Americans—and, I'll include myself in this—have to stop, have to challenge the notion that “Just make it easy for me. Make it easy so that I can easily digest it the way that I do everything else in my own culture.” No. Make me understand where you're coming from. Or, challenge me to understand where you're coming from. And, all of a sudden, we communicate with a bigger part of the world.

AV: I've used this image in another context, but it's the difference between thinking about translation as this kind of intercultural cruise ship where we travel around the world and we get the same food, the same experience, the same clothing, whether we're in Istanbul or Buenos Aires; and a kind of travel where each place is unique and compelling and fascinating in and of its own right, different. Because, again, if it's not different, then why bother?

HG: What experience do you have with temporality? Like, is there a play that you've translated that has been translated before that you're like, “Okay, that translation worked for the 1950s, say—the thing that comes to my mind is *Threepenny Opera*. When you see

that 50s version of *Threepenny Opera* and then you see the 1994 Donmar Warehouse version of the play. They're both translations from the same source, but drastically different plays because the audiences for those plays were distinct. 1950s US was very different than a 1990s reality, so the translator or the producers of that production saw a need to go back to the original.

AV: I think any good theatrical translator, if not any good translator in general, would agree that things need to be retranslated at least every twenty years, if not sooner than that. Language changes. Context changes. What may be captured by an early twentieth-century translation or a late nineteenth-century translation... I think there can be value, a tremendous amount of value in looking at those, in studying those. You're also going to lose certain things and not convey to your audience in the present what you want to do.

HG: I want to talk about best practices: in terms of in the rehearsal and when you're sitting alone at the table translating. Understanding that every process is different: What would you say are the “do's and don'ts”?

AV: Again I'm talking about my own practices and that is going to be different for everyone. I mean, I feel strongly that I translate from Spanish into English and I'm not going to translate from English into Spanish. Even though I consider myself to be fluent in Spanish, inevitably there are going to be matices, hues that I'm not going to catch because it's not my native language. I think that's the place that I would come down, in the end. And in terms of not choosing what you're going to translate, I mean, I've only had one experience of it, which was with a Peruvian playwright named Sara Joffre who I met and I spent time with, and she badly wanted me to translate a play that she had written about Colette. She sent me the text and I sat down and started working on it and there was nothing about it that spoke to me and I was doing a lousy job of translating it, and finally I had to say to her, “Sorry, but this isn't working. You need to find somebody who has a connection to the play, a fire in the belly about translating it.” I think each translation project has to begin that way.

There has to be something about the piece in the source language that gets you excited. Because if you don't have that, it won't work. It can be anything. It can be—“this is a play that I don't understand. Why don't I understand it?” because in the process of translating, I don't think there is any better way to truly get inside of a text, and you're going to find out what it is that you don't understand and then try and figure out, “Okay, I didn't understand this. How do I make it comprehensible for my source audience in the course of translating?”

Like I was saying earlier, my process is do this very fast initial translation then I go back and revise and at that point, I'm still working with the source and my translation and if I continue to revise, there comes a point at which I put the source language aside because now it's all about how does this work in the target language? Particularly when you get to the point of hearing it. By that point, I'm confident enough that I have answered all of the semantic questions and now it's, “Okay, what are the performative questions that have to be answered?” You have to hear it and you want to discover things. While an actor, a given actor, may

not know the cultural context, they're going to know when something feels right or wrong and there are instances, I think, that you're going to want to preserve that wrongness because, again, like we were talking about earlier, how do you get a production team and the audience to come closer to the piece? You want them to work a bit, rather than it being completely a seamless experience. At the same time there are going to be places where the wrongness is wrong and is going to have to be altered. I think that first step of choosing something to translate becomes the most important part, something that really compels you for whatever reason, that becomes the most important thing because that's what's going to be your through-line towards the final translation. Whatever it was that grabbed my attention about this piece in the original language is what I want to be able to convey in the final translation. And, again, it could be virtually anything.

HG: I love hearing you talk about process. It has been a pleasure talking to you. Thank you for your time.

NOTES

1. <http://drama.unc.edu/mercurian.html>
2. Yukiko Motoya. *Vengeance Can Wait*. Trans. Kyoko Yoshida and Andy Bragen. *The Mercurian* 2.2 (2009).
3. <http://www.carolinaperformingarts.org/process-series>
4. *The Theatre of Sabina Berman: The Agony of Ecstasy and Other Plays*. Translated by Adam Versényi. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002.
5. *The Mercurian* 3.1.
6. "Translation as an Epistemological Paradigm for Theatre in the Americas." *Theatre Journal* 59.3 (2007).
7. Griselda Gambaro. *Bitter Blood*. Trans. Adam Versényi. New Play Festival, Florida Studio Theatre. 1986. Unpublished.
8. <http://www.playmakersrep.org/makingofakinghenryIV>

Croisades in Québec: On the Semiotics of Contemporary French *Dramaturgie*

Scott D. Taylor

Introduction: *Dramaturgy* vs. *Dramaturgie*

The term “dramaturgy” is problematic in theater studies for many reasons. In England and the United States, for example, the “dramaturg” is the individual who is responsible for conducting all necessary research (historical, social, political, literary, and practical) for the purposes of production. But the term “dramaturg” or “dramaturgy” is problematic because it may also refer to the act of playwriting itself, and as we shall see, contemporary French *dramaturgie* has evolved into a hybrid activity that blurs the lines between actor-director-playwright-analyst. Ultimately, the French view of dramaturgy does not restrict theatre companies to a so-called faithful interpretation of the written text; instead, it allows companies to explore the limitless territory of theatrical signification, consequently reinforcing the importance of viewing the relationship between text and performance as a “trans-reading” rather than a “translation.” Contemporary French *dramaturgie* declares the autonomy of the art of *mise-en-scène* and affirms a unique language of the stage.

Nowhere is this hybridity more evident than in the work of Patrice Pavis, who has given much attention to the question of dramaturgy. As early as 1982, Pavis first published a model of dramaturgical analysis, which, he states

goes beyond a semiological description of stage systems... [It] asks, pragmatically, what the spectator will get out of the performance, how theatre relates to the audience’s ideological and aesthetic frame of reference. It integrates and reconciles a semiological (aesthetic) perspective on the performance signs with a sociological examination of the production and reception of these same signs. (*Dictionary*, 15)

Pavis’s view of dramaturgical analysis is a holistic one that takes both the production and reception of the written and performance texts into consideration. It is a circuitous model that focuses on two

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fundamental processes: fictionalization and ideologization. It can be applied to a study of the written text and/or to the performance text pre- or post-production, respectively. Succinctly, it is a dramaturgical methodology that sets its task on the retrieval and rediscovery of a so-called *idéologème*, a kernel of thought which functions as a through-line between various levels of textuality.

In this article we will utilize Pavis's model of dramaturgical analysis in a study of a Québécois production of Michel Azama's play *Croisades*. In so doing, we will discover how contemporary French *dramaturgie* has come to herald the autonomy of the art of *mise-en-scène* as it responds to and absorbs an *idéologème* based on an idea of "Universality" that has been inherited from and cultivated by the historical and political movements of *decentralization* and *collectivism*. But before going further, let us first briefly take a look at the playwright, play and company whose work we will examine in order to better understand this trend in contemporary French *dramaturgie*.

Azama, *Croisades*, and Les Créations Diving Horse: A New Generation of Dramaturges

Michel Azama is a member of a new generation of playwrights who, according to Pavis, are transforming contemporary French theatre. Among the most important of these transformations is the abandonment of support for a singular philosophical system or aesthetic/political agenda. "They [contemporary playwrights] do not cling to any one, particular philosophy—Existentialism, Nihilism, Absurdism, or Marxism—nor to any one particular artistic movement" (Pavis, "Synthèse," 5).¹ He adds that the idea of supporting a so-called thesis or particular ideology remains foreign to this new set of playwrights. "Their universe is rather that of individual representations, which do not exclude a global seizing of the issues" (5)²

Born in the Pyrenees Mountains of Catalonia in 1947, Azama was originally trained as an actor at the famous Ecole Jacques Lecoq, along with Ariane Mnouchkine. He eventually abandoned acting in order to concentrate on a career as a playwright. Currently, he works as a playwright for the Nouveau Théâtre de Bourgogne and for the Centre Dramatique National de Dijon. He is also a literary advisor for the CNEC (Centre National des Ecritures Contemporaines) – La Chartreuse, and is editor-in-chief of the theatrical revue *Les Cahiers de Prospero*. His plays include *Faits Divers*, *Zoo de Nuit*, *Les Deux Terres d'Akhenaton*, *Aztèques*, *Iphigénie ou le Pêché des Dieux*, *Croisades*, *Le Sas*, *Bled* and *Vie et Mort de Pier Paolo Pasolini*.

His one-act play *Croisades* was first produced in 1988 at la Chartreuse de Villeneuve-les-Avignon in France. As the introduction to the published text describes, the play was the result of an experiment centered on theatrical writing, organized by le CIRCA and THEATRALES with the help of the Centre National des Lettres (Girard and Engelbach, Foreword to *Croisades*, 5). The goal of such communal experimentation was to relieve the playwright from his "habitual solitude" (5). The significance of this will become clearer once we begin to apply Pavis's model to our analysis, as it signals the role that decentralization and collectivism play, not only in the textualization of *Croisades*, but also more generally in contemporary French *dramaturgie*.

Structurally speaking, the play unravels in a series of fifteen sequences, and consists of three primary narratives: (1) the mythological

story of "Maman Poule" and her eight-hundred-year journey to the promised land of Jerusalem; (2) the individual stories of the victims of various wars and crusades who, in a painful and sometimes comic routine, are welcomed to the land of the dead by the characters of the Old Man and Old Woman; and finally, (3) the central narrative, which involves the lives of four young people (Krim, Ismaïl, Yonathon and Bella) who find themselves caught in the crossfire of war. The text is, therefore, a sort of tapestry of fictions.

As for the company whose production on which we will focus, Les Créations Diving Horse produced *Croisades* at the Théâtre Prospero in Montréal, Canada, in the winter of 2000. Central to the theatre company's aesthetic vision, according to Artistic Director Phoebe Greenberg, is the notion of *la bouffonnerie*, a concept directly inspired by the work of Jacques Lecoq. Greenberg explains:

La bouffonnerie is very vast. For me, what is most important is the element of parody. *Les bouffons* make fun of us, and also of our beliefs, our deepest convictions. The element of mockery carries with it a certain mystery. It allows us to look at things from a different angle, to distance ourselves a bit, to talk about things in a new way that would not be possible, in my opinion, with melodrama or tragedy, in a time when people have a certain lucidity. (Labrecque, 19)³

In its experience with *buffoonery*, Greenberg's audience should not necessarily "identify" with the *bouffon* in the traditional sense; ideally, they should be uncomfortably intrigued by him, and struggle to watch from a safe distance that allows for refuge in the belief that this ridiculous creature is not a reflection their own lives. Indeed, Greenberg's buffoons

... give the impression that they are not us... They come from elsewhere, which already offers a freedom of play, and which incites us even more to accept what they say. It's different from a clown. We identify with the clown: when he has an accident on stage, we laugh about it. Whereas, we have the impression that *les bouffons* laugh at us. And it's a hollow laugh that borders on the territory of tragedy. (Greenberg)⁴

Dramaturgical Analysis of the Performance Text: *Croisades* in Québec

In the preceding discussion of *Croisades*—the written text and the performance text—we can already begin to peel off the first layer in the gradual unmasking of an *idéologème* that permeates all levels of textuality referred to earlier in Pavis's model for dramaturgical analysis. More specifically, the communal and experimental nature of both texts reflects an ideological inheritance of two major movements in contemporary French theatre: decentralization and collectivism. Both texts (the written and performance) respond quite materially to history and theory by absorbing these influences into their own productive processes, contributing to an ideological discourse that manifests itself in the form of what Pavis would call an *ideotextual idéologème*.

Let us recall that Pavis's model of dramaturgical analysis is circuitous and involves two primary processes: *fictionalization* and *ideologization*. Fictionalization represents an attempt to explain how

the textual and scenic productions of fiction are capable of organizing the dramatic material into a story or *fable*. It is intimately linked with *ideologization* and can ultimately only be understood in terms of this relationship, due to the pervasive nature of ideology, which permeates everything. Thus, the second major component in Pavis's circuit of concretization involves the "textualization of ideology" or the "ideologization of the text," which focuses on the extent to which ideology infiltrates the text as well as the text's effect on ideology. This inquiry implies a theoretical conception of the text as a triadic structure composed of (a) the *autotextual*, (b) the *intertextual*, and (c) the *ideotextual*. Facilitating the passage between these various textual levels is the *idéologème*, described as "a hybrid being that functions simultaneously as a textual and ideological unit within a given social, ideological and discursive formation" (*Voix et images de la scène*, 290). It is on the ideotextual level, therefore, where we can begin to discover how the *idéologème* of *Croisades* was cultivated by the movements of decentralization and collectivism.

Paavolainen describes the *ideotext* as that level of the text that is primarily concerned with "the prevalence of world views; ideological and psychological interpretations are most center [at this level], so that all the meanings of the work are opened up towards the external world" ("Patrice Pavis: A Good Eye for Theater," on-line article). In its experimentation with *la bouffonnerie*, Les Créations Diving Horse sought to bring a new sensitivity to the physical and meta-physical elements of Azama's tragic farce, one that emphasized an understanding of the human condition in a globalized world, outside of cultural, national or political references. It is here where the *idéologème* begins to emerge and link with the movements of decentralization and collectivism—a link found on the ideotextual level in the notion of "Universalism."

In practical terms, decentralization marked the movement of professional theater companies from the capital, Paris, to the suburbs, to the various regions outside of the *Island of France* where federally funded theater had not really existed. Jean Vilar was an especially important figure during the first phase of decentralisation due to his desire to create "a theatre for all." As David Bradby explains, Vilar believed that theater served a noble cause: "To furnish a space where order could triumph from chaos, and where human beings could gather in order to acquire wisdom" (154).⁵ In ideological terms, the celebration of community and democracy led Vilar to cultivate a theater that emphasized similarities rather than differences among people of varying social classes. His attempt to bring "quality theater" out of the capital and into *les provinces* represented a means by which to achieve such a unifying goal.

However, the very idea of unity and universality which was at the heart of Vilar's theater would eventually be challenged during the second phase of decentralization beginning in the 1960s. Obviously, the use of such a concept as "universality" for the purposes of artistic representation is vulnerable to criticism. Roland Barthes, for example, questioned its value in his 1957 article, "The Great Family of Man," where he referred to the universalizing concept of "the human condition" as a "myth [that] rests on a very old mystification, which always consists in placing Nature at the bottom of History" (Barthes, 43). More specifically, his argument was that ideas of universality, in fact, conceal the historical nature of political and economic power relations, covering up the important details that expose



Figure 1: *les vieux* (the Old Couple) in Les Créations Diving Horse's production of *Croisades*.

the causes of social disparity in a comforting blanket of "togetherness." As Latimer explains:

In "The Great Family of Man," Barthes shows how an emotive word like "family" can fill us with sentimental feelings of common purpose and universality, feelings which would not be so objectionable if they did not hide the real advantages that one branch of the "family" has over other branches. (41)

Thus, if the first phase of decentralization was characterized by a vision of social utopia, the second phase discarded the rose-colored glasses and acknowledged the reality of social disparity. The discovery of Brecht and the application of his theories by Roger Planchon contributed significantly to this aesthetic revolution. "Like Brecht, Planchon fought to create a theatre that respects the human dimension of lived experience, but he also seeks to surprise his audience by refusing familiar images and by making new signs and new meanings appear in the representation" (157).⁶ Planchon's larger, political goal was to popularize the theater and make it pertinent to the working class; he believed that it was important to present the "non-cultivated audience" with the "very best" that theater had to offer, "and then see what happens" (Bradby, 204).⁷ When this goal failed to be achieved, and the working classes remained indifferent to the theater, Planchon was not surprised, as Bradby explains, because he realized that the theater could not have "a lot of impact on a state of things that only a change in civilization can alter" (204).⁸



Figure 2: The androgynous Maman Poule.

By the 1960s, a new generation of theater artists had come to inherit the goals and, consequently, the contradictions of decentralization, and it is at this time that a new vision of the *dramaturge* developed. The *création collective* represented a renewed attempt to make theater pertinent to the working classes while at the same time equalizing its power dynamics by respecting the importance of all contributing theater practitioners (e.g., actors, directors, lighting designers, set designers). The director would no longer serve as dictator of the *mise-en-scène*, but rather every member would contribute equally, and, most importantly, be paid equally. But perhaps the most significant consequence of the *création collective* is that it diminished the traditional importance accorded to the playwright/*dramaturge*, who had now been reduced to the role of a literary advisor to the collectively producing company.

In accordance with Pavis's model, this examination of the historical and theoretical transformations in contemporary French theater, from the first phase of decentralization to the *création collective*, functions as the ideotextual level from which to examine the *idéologème* that comprises the dramaturgy of *Croisades* in Québec. Due to the extratextual nature of the ideotext, however, this *idéologème* is visible only on the inter- and auto-textual levels, where it is further refined and/or transformed upon its insertion into the text(s). In the performance text, *la bouffonnerie* facilitates the adoption of various disguises that mask an *idéologème* based on the notion of a universality

hidden in dramaturgical techniques of fragmentation, banalization, ambiguity, mockery and distancing; it punctuates a conscious rejection of a strict, realistic representation in favor of a hybrid performance style that oscillates between realism and the fantastic, where *vraisemblance* fuses with the *extraordinaire*.

In order to get a more concrete understanding of *la bouffonnerie* and how it works toward achieving its particular brand of universalism, let us consider a few photos from Les Créations Diving Horse's production of *Croisades*. Starting with the portrayal of the Old Couple, "*les vieux*," we notice that they appear as both human and non-human, with their strangely colored skin and faces, long claw-like nails, wild and beastly hair, and their extravagant, surrealist costumes (Figure 1). Additionally, the actors contort their bodies, alter and deform their gestures and posture, causing them to appear somewhat alien to humanity; they can neither be localized nor identified by nationality, ethnicity, sex nor race. This allows the couple to appear as strangely familiar creatures, having some relation to the "real world," but not entirely a part of it.

Another example from the production that serves to illustrate some of the universalizing characteristics of *la bouffonnerie* includes the portrayal of the character "Maman Poule" (Figure 2). She appears androgynous in her curiously designed costume composed of a free-flowing, faded, rustic yellow gown, adorned with a large head-piece consisting of a metal plate topped with skeletal protrusions that extend nearly a foot into the air. Hanging from her neck are several layers of beads of various sizes and colors. Her face is covered entirely with a heavy, thick, white makeup that erases any trace of gender specificity. And in stark contrast to her all-encompassing white makeup is the painted-on, blood red mask that encircles her eyes. She carries with her a mummified doll wrapped in tattered cloth, and



Figure 3: Burned Man and Red Man

she gazes ahead with an expression of detached concern on her face. The extraordinary nature of the costumes and makeup produces an a-temporal effect that impedes localization or identification, and that contributes to the “universalizing” thematics of the text. Time and space remain liminal in this universe; action is neither here nor there, now nor then, but everywhere and nowhere all at once.

The Inter- and Auto-Texts

Shifting our focus back now to the intertextual level—the level which, according to Paavolainen, “maintains a discursive relationship to earlier interpretations, also offering a possibility to future interpretations”—we can now begin to examine the *idéologème* of *Croisades* according to its relationship with other texts (Paavolainen). Here, a larger understanding of the term “text” is implied, one that surpasses traditional notions of “text” as something written (or even performed). In this case, it may certainly involve this traditional definition, but can also incorporate a more contemporary meaning based on the idea that everything is text, that objects, ideas, people, and places are textual bodies that can be “read.” In this way, a study of intertextuality in *Croisades* includes textual elements from various domains (e.g., political, literary, scenographic).

Throughout the course of the play, there is a continual reversal of roles among the characters: friends become enemies; enemies become lovers; “Us” becomes “Other”; the status of couples is ambiguous. This is an intertextual dynamic that can be retraced throughout the course of theater history. In *Waiting for Godot*, for example, master becomes servant, as is the case with Lucky and Pozzo. Enemies become friends as with Zapo and Zépo in Arrabal’s *Pique-nique en campagne*. Going even further back, slave becomes master in Marivaux’ *L’île des esclaves*; peasant becomes bourgeois in the theater of Molière; and perhaps in the most shocking role-reversal in theater history, mother becomes lover as with *Oedipus the King*. Unlike many of the previous examples however, this dynamic of reversal is transformed in *Croisades* to incorporate not only a sense of ambiguity but a sense of fusion as well. The characters do not simply shed their original roles and assume new ones, but rather, they combine the two; they remain friend and enemy at once; alive yet dead; lover and murderer. This fusion transforms the intertextual element of role-reversal and creates an even greater sense of ambiguity that further contributes to the universalizing character of the text’s *idéologème*.

As for the performance of Azama’s text by Les Créations Diving Horse, Greenberg’s production clearly points to continued experimentation in theatricalization on the intertextual level, and consequently, asserts the autonomy of the stage and its ability to transform and transcend the written text. One example of this involves the portrayal of the characters “Burned Man” and “Red Man.” In Greenberg’s production, the two characters are clothed in brightly colored and ornately designed costumes with ruffled collars and flowing sleeves that evoke images of the *commedia dell’arte*. The two symbolize the master-servant tradition of a Harlequin and Pantalone, but this intertextual allusion also transcends tradition by advancing a dramaturgical technique of metatheatre, one that has a tri-fold structure: a theater within theater within theater (Figure 3).

Another example of intertextual play in this Québécois production is a meditation on the motif of *la marche funèbre*, or what is known as the

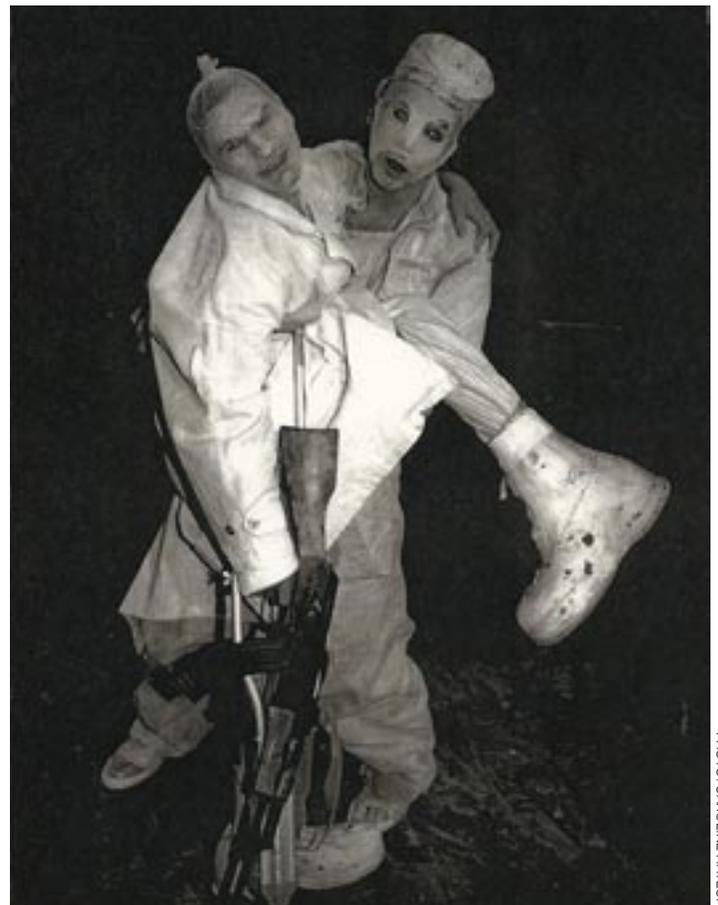


PHOTO: CAROLINE HAVEUR

Figure 4: soldiers Yonathan and Ismaïl

“journey toward death.” This motif is one of the most significant dramaturgical structures of the written text as it represents an unconscious journey toward death that surprises the characters once the moment arrives. “Death comes to men as it does to animals: in the subconscious,” the Old Woman remarks (Azama, 46).⁹ Such a statement suggests that all along the journey, the signs that foreshadow death’s inevitability are always present, lingering in the background, waiting for some unlucky person to uncover them. These elusive signs accumulate continuously until eventually their signals are unavoidable, and another character completes the journey from the unconscious to the conscious, to use the Old Woman’s logic. In the performance text, the subtle accumulation of these “background signs” assumes many forms. On-looking characters like the Old Couple may watch and wait patiently at a distance; lights may slowly fade from brightness to darkness, signaling the ill-fated approach of the unwanted visitor; sound effects may echo faint noises of death’s impending arrival. Even costume may contribute to this effect. Once again, the portrayal of Maman Poule in Greenberg’s production illustrates how this is accomplished (Figure 2). Each piece of her costume and makeup seems to evoke an image of death. The airy, yellow gown and white makeup cause Maman Poule to appear as a free-floating ghost who often looms ominously in the dark shadows. Her red-masked eyes provoke disturbing images of a wounded, blood-covered body, while the skeletal headpiece serves as a visual sign of decayed remains. These are the small pieces of an accumulating vector that help to articulate the “death march” motif, another dimension of the universalizing *idéologème* on the intertextual level.

Finally, our understanding of ideology as an infinitely pervasive structure that imposes itself on both production and reception neces-

sarily implies that, at any given moment within the autotext of performance, the traces of the *idéologème* are present and readable. The autotext “focuses on the closed-off aspect of the world created on stage: the play as well as its performance remains [sic] ‘within their own world’” (Paavolainen). The avant-garde and Symbolist stages are prime examples of *autotextual mise-en-scène* in their ability to create a uniquely self-referential theatrical universe, cut-off from the outside world and not indulging in the fetish of mimesis. Therefore, we will consider another image from Greenberg’s production of *Croisades* that clearly communicates, in a very physical sense, the ambiguity evoked by the universalizing *idéologème*. It is an image of the two protagonists, the soldiers Yonathan and Ismaïl, as they are reunited at the end of the play (Figure 4). At this moment, Yonathan and Ismaïl are simultaneously children and adults, friends as well as enemies, soldiers and civilians. At one point in the performance, their bodies become blended into one, making it impossible to determine where one begins and the other ends. They are fused together, creating the impression of a hideous creature with two heads: one that is partially masked, and the other covered in netting. Further contributing to this sense of fusion are their intertwined legs: one is broken and twisted, extending outward from the center of their bodies; a crutch and rifle mask the other leg. Although one soldier appears to be carrying the other, it is not clear who supports whom; their bodies move forward as one entity, like a pair of conjoined twins, two autonomous individuals melded into one. In short, they are buffoons.

This begins to demonstrate the interdependent relationship between fictionalization and ideology in Pavis’s “circuit of concretization.” In the performance text, the element of *la bouffonnerie* transforms the *idéologème* of the play through its implementation of mockery and parody; it testifies to the eclectic nature of contemporary dramaturgy, combing post-absurdist, kaleidoscopic fragmentation, while fusing the extraordinary with the mundane. The *bouffon’s* “theatrical language” alternates delicately between pejorative argot and elevated poetry; the *bouffon* undermines the validity of all knowledge; he questions the legitimacy of wars (“crusades”) that are waged on faulty lines of demarcation between a not-so-clearly defined “Us” and “Them.” Composed of its exaggerated, clown-like makeup and extravagant costumes, the *bouffonesque* performance transforms the *idéologème* of universality to make a mockery of certainty; and through a paradoxical desire for greater objectivity, the *bouffon* strips the *idéologème* of its confining singularity in this Québécois context.

Conclusion

This study of *la bouffonnerie* in *Croisades* in Québec signals how contemporary French *dramaturgie* has evolved to emphasize the importance of the physicality of stage language. Since Artaud, the relationship between the written text and performance has been vigorously debated in French theatre semiotics studies. Artaud himself acknowledged the existence of a purely theatrical language, one that could only be written and understood in space, where actors and their costumes appeared as “hieroglyphs,” signaling some long-forgotten message originally conceived at the creation of the universe itself. The written text, at most, was no more than a prop for him in his pursuit to rediscover this metaphysical language.

Furthermore contributing to this discourse concerning the autonomy of theatrical language in French *dramaturgie* was the discov-

ery of Brecht. Although Brecht was by no means a metaphysicist like Artaud, a parallel between the two is nevertheless apparent in the importance that both men placed on the communicative power of performance and its ability to transcend the written text, a belief that consequently provoked Barthes to describe Brecht as “a Marxist who thought about the effects of the sign: a rare thing.”¹⁰ As Bradby continues:

Brecht was very aware of verbal and semiological communication, of the function of gesture as well as the function of language, and his plays are not entirely themselves as much as they are data in a language whose every element (every object, every movement) carries meaning. (143)¹¹

The third interlocutor in this discourse on theatrical language and its relationship to French *dramaturgie* is the Existential theatre that ultimately dominated the French scene from the late 1950s to the early 1980s. Playwrights (in the tradition of Beckett and Ionesco) bombarded audiences with concrete, spatial images that repeatedly pointed to a lack of purposeful design in the universe, to the impossibility of communication, and to singular, subjective realities where individual characters were left to confront their own insignificance in an indifferent world. The language of the theater turned inward (autonomic), becoming introspective and self-referential rather than mimetic and representational; it sought to construct reality rather than reflect it. Individual identity was sacrificed, and characters like Didi and Gogo, Zapo and Zépo, and Mr. and Mrs. Martin made their stage debuts, calling into question the validity of individual essence.

Since then, contemporary French *dramaturgie* has responded to this discourse concerning the status of language by creating plays that tend to be “perfectly readable... These writers’ texts are read as literary works... They were, however, written for the stage” (Pavis, “Synthèse,” 2).¹² These new plays by these young playwrights are “what they are”; they are to be taken at face value; they present complex worlds without seeking immediate understanding. Whereas the *nouveau théâtre* of Beckett or Ionesco often emphasized the impossibility of language to communicate anything meaningful, today’s French playwrights prefer linguistic simplification, inviting their readers to “to take them at their word, to not look for metaphoric or hidden meanings” (2).¹³ Such a move toward simplification consequently facilitates easier access for the purposes of theatricalization.

“The texts are easier to act, to interpret on stage by an actor, than they are to read, as if it sufficed to unfold them, to take them out of their packaging in order to deploy them on stage and make them accessible to the spectator’s gaze” (Pavis, 3).¹⁴ In the end, contemporary French *dramaturgie* is to be taken at face value; it presents complex worlds without seeking immediate understanding. “It is no longer a question of interpreting or transforming the world, in the way that Hegel or Marx formerly did, but rather of interpolating, questioning, without however, waiting for an immediate response in return” (7).¹⁵ Accordingly, contemporary French *dramaturgie* typically has sparse stage directions, sparse character description, sparse narrative; the storytelling lies on stage and in the imaginations of directors, actors, designers, technicians who concretize the script, who give it voice, intention and significance.

NOTES

1. Ils [les dramaturges contemporains] ne se réclament d'aucune philosophie—existentialisme, nihilisme, absurde, marxisme—ni d'aucun mouvement artistique. (All translations from the French are the author's, unless noted otherwise.)

2. Leur univers est plutôt celui des représentations individuelles, lesquelles n'excluent pas une saisie globale des problèmes.

3. La bouffonnerie, c'est très vaste. Pour moi, ce qui est capital, c'est l'élément de parodie. Les bouffons se moquent de nous, mais aussi de nos croyances, de nos convictions les plus profondes. L'élément de moquerie porte un certain mystère. Ça permet de poser un regard différent sur les choses, de s'en distancier un peu, d'en parler d'une façon qui ne serait pas possible, à mon avis, avec le mélodrame ou la tragédie, à une époque où les gens ont une certaine lucidité.

4. ...donnent l'impression qu'ils ne sont pas nous... Ils viennent d'ailleurs, ce qui offre déjà une liberté de jeu, nous incite davantage à accepter ce qu'ils disent. C'est différent du clown. On s'identifie au clown: quand il a un accident sur scène, on en rit. Tandis qu'on a l'impression que les bouffons rient de nous. Et c'est un rire jaune, ça peut toucher le territoire de la tragédie.

5. ...de fournir un espace où l'ordre pouvait triompher du chaos, et où les êtres humains pouvaient s'unir pour acquérir la sagesse.

6. Comme Brecht, Planchon s'est battu pour créer un théâtre qui respecte la dimension humaine de l'expérience vécue, mais cherche aussi à surprendre son public en refusant les images familières et en faisant apparaître à la représentation des signes et des sens nouveaux.

7. ...et ensuite, voir ce qui se passe.

8. ...beaucoup d'impact sur un état de choses que seul un changement de civilisation peut modifier.

9. La mort arrive aux hommes comme aux bêtes: dans l'inconscience.

10. ...un marxiste qui avait réfléchi sur les effets du signe: chose rare.

11. Brecht était très sensible à la communication verbale et sémiologique, à la fonction du geste autant qu'à celle du langage, et ses pièces ne sont pleinement elles-mêmes que données dans un langage dont chaque élément (chaque objet, chaque mouvement) est porteur de sens.

12. ...parfaitement lisibles... Ces textes d'auteur se lisent comme des oeuvres littéraires ... Ils ont certes été écrits pour la scène.

13. ...les prendre à la lettre, de ne pas leur chercher des sens métaphoriques ou cachés.

14. Les textes sont plus faciles à jouer, à interpréter sur une scène par un acteur, qu'à lire, comme s'il suffisait de les déplier, de les sortir de la boîte du livre pour les déployer sur la scène et les rendre accessibles au regard du spectateur.

15. Il ne s'agit plus d'interpréter ni de transformer le monde, à la manière ancienne d'un Hegel ou d'un Marx, mais de l'interpeller, sans pourtant attendre de réponse immédiate en retour.

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