

2016 Belmont University Research Symposium

Theatre I

Moderator: James Al-Shamma, Ph.D.

April 20, 2017

3:30 PM-5:00 PM

IHSB 340

3:30 PM-3:45 PM

Erwin Piscator and the Birth of Epic Theatre

Amanda Bell

Faculty Advisor: James Al-Shamma, Ph.D.

In evaluating the birth of Epic Theatre, the uninformed often look to German playwright/director Bertolt Brecht; however, German director/producer Erwin Piscator influenced the creation of Epic Theatre as much, if not more, than Brecht did. Although Brecht gave form to the ideas and practices of the movement, many of them originated with Piscator. Germany during the 1920s was a place of political and social unrest; this setting influenced Piscator as he developed his ideas, as did his experiences at war. In *The Political Theatre*, he outlines his theories and discoveries. Art alone was not enough anymore, and neither were politics; thus, Piscator found a way to marry the two, striving for a Total Theatre that rejected linear storytelling. Piscator and Brecht, influencing one another, developed Epic Theatre, which emphasized socio-political content in drama over emotional manipulation. Piscator believed that theatre could contribute to the shaping of history in addition to being shaped *by* history. Audiences should be able to see what could very well be their own reality by witnessing the reality of a historical – and relevant – situation on the stage. Piscator’s impact is considerable and he deserves greater recognition for his major contribution to the birth of Epic Theatre; he cared about art, cared about the world, and cared about combining the two to bring about change.

3:45 PM-4:00 PM

Bohemian Shakespeare: The Dying Romanian Ophelia

EmElise Knapp

Faculty Advisor: James Al-Shamma, Ph.D.

Shakespeare’s plays have been staged at various times across the globe in order to comment on local political and social circumstances. *Hamlet* is no exception. It is a play that interrogates, among other things, the purpose of war, as well as the susceptibility of authority to corruption. During one of the most dynamic and unstable times in Romania’s history, the 1980s of the Communist regime, many productions of *Hamlet* were mounted, despite the incompatibility of some of the ideas inherent in the play with Communist ideology. Nevertheless, the treatment of, and attitudes toward, Ophelia mirrors those experienced by Romanian women at the time. Romanian women experienced limited rights, and this had a crippling and dehumanizing effect on them. The representation of Ophelia in Romanian productions of *Hamlet* reveals much about the status of Romanian women under Communist rule.

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Girl Power?: The Motivations of Female Restoration Era Playwrights

Storm Sloan

Faculty Advisor: James Al-Shamma, Ph.D.

This research grew out of one central question: Why have there not been more strong female protagonists in plays by female playwrights? To begin exploring this question, this paper focuses on female Restoration playwrights and their personal motivations for writing. An examination of these motives reveals why these playwrights failed to create what contemporary viewers would consider to be strong female characters.

4:15 PM-4:30 PM

Living Bodies: Theatre as a Representation of Life

Courtney Potter

Faculty Advisor: James Al-Shamma, Ph.D.

Theatre often holds up a mirror to society, reflecting back what is here; theatre is a representation of life. Life imitates art after all, just as art imitates life. Authentic visibility for underrepresented minority groups, especially those with physical and mental disabilities, is extremely important and habitually overlooked in contemporary entertainment. Representation on stage is a powerful means of visibility, and since people with disabilities represent the U.S.'s largest minority, broader inclusion is warranted. Theatre should be used as a platform for inclusivity, both by presenting material by and for disabled artists, and by consciously breaking down the stigma surrounding disability which still permeates popular entertainment and contemporary culture today.

4:30 PM-4:45 PM

Serving Magical Realness: Magical Realism and Queer Subversion in Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*

Andrew Timms

Faculty Advisor: James Al-Shamma, Ph.D.

Magical realism is a term that is thrown around quite liberally regarding fantastical literature, but the origins of the term point to the true purpose of the genre. Magical realism began in Latin America in response to colonialism. It was utilized to counter encroaching European culture and fight against oppression. Tony Kushner utilizes techniques found in magical realist works in his magnum opus, *Angels in America*, as a way to subvert the traditional hero of Western literature. Rather than a dashing, strong, and masculine protagonist, Kushner presents a frightened gay man suffering from AIDS during the Reagan era. He deploys magical realist techniques to undermine

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queer oppression while giving gay men a space to safely grieve and heal from the horrific memories of the AIDS outbreak. Regarded as "one of the only AIDS plays with a happy ending," this dynamic work serves as a protest piece that inspires hope by establishing a gay man, during one of the darkest periods of LGBT history, as worthy of the title "Prophet."

4:45 PM-5:00 PM

Antigone: Placing a Tragedy of Ancient Greece in a Gothic Antebellum

Setting

Taylor Thomas, Shelby Hess

Faculty Advisors: Paul Gatrell, M.F.A., Jessica Mueller, M.F.A.

In the 2017 Belmont University production of the new work *Antigone*, by Ara Vito, the design team faced the challenge of creating a visual story that combined the lore of Greek tragedy with the romance of the Southern Gothic literary movement. The team found inspiration in aspects of nature and the desolation of war. Drawing imaginatively on historical sources, the costume and set designer built a new world inside Belmont University's Blackbox Theatre.