CATALAN EXPERIMENTAL THEATER

The Catalan Experimental Theater (Teatro experimental catalán) is an innovative theatrical movement that originated in Catalonia, Spain, at the end of the 1970s. Experimentation in Catalan theater began in the so-called street theater. Els Comediants, La Cubana, La Fura dels Baus, and Xarxa Teatre are the most representative street-theater groups. Street theater is characterized by a new relationship between the actors and the public that distances itself from the Italian street theater; the integration of urban space into the scenic creation; the incorporation of diverse “plastic” elements (sound, music, noise, as well as objects, props, decorations, and wardrobe) that reduce or even eliminate the verbal elements; and itinerant shows that mimic parades, exploiting fully the relationship between scene and auditorium.

Another experimental wave of expression, more associated with Italian theatrical fashion, entails Brau Teatre, Dagoll-Dagom, Els Joglars, Grup d’Acció Teatral, Sènola Teatre, Teatre Lliure, and Tricicle. This wave encompasses the following changes in the mode of representation: an extremely provocative performance that attacks all institutions, including the church; a positive reassessment of the show as a collective enterprise of different art forms; a consideration of the play as secondary to spectacle; a parallel production of staging, seminars, and research papers; the use of private and independent playhouses, as opposed to commercial or public ones; and an absence of traditional theater professionals.

The three most accomplished Catalan theater groups in the last quarter of the 20th century are Els Comediants, La Fura dels Baus, and Els Joglars.

Els Comediants first emerged in 1972 with a show called Non plus plús, in which mimicry was the main component, along with the influence of the American group Bread & Puppet. From 1976 with Apoteosis soiree (Apoteosis soirée) and especially after 1978 with Sun; Little Sun (Sol solet) Els Comediants moved beyond an Italian style of theater and introduced a complex form of theater. Mostly this new variety involved explosions of vitality that required leaving the stage or creating an atypical relationship with the audience. Wonders of Cervenia (Maravillas de Cervenia, 2006) constitutes its latest show.

La Fura dels Baus developed the most imaginative and transgressive concept of theater of the 1980s. The festive personality of this group favors the expressive musical components and elements of the street theater. In 1982 the group premiered Actions (Accions). Its performances progressively moved toward new theatrical conceptions in which the most predominant components are noise, music, the scarcity of words, and plastic elements. Other shows by this group include Sur/Sur (1985), Tier Mon (1988), and Nouts (1990).

Els Joglars is probably the oldest surviving experimental Catalan group. Its first performance was Mimodrama in 1963. It foregrounded pantomime, the visual “gag,” and modern machinery full of surprising effects. In 1977 the performance of La tona led to the arrest of many of its members, who had to reunite in exile. Other shows by the group are The Odyssey (L’Odissèa, 1979), Teledium (1983), Fontainebleau’s Virtuosi (El virtuosos de Fontainebleau, 1985), Bye, Bye, Beethoven (1987), Columbus’ Lupsus (Columbí lupsus, 1989), and The Retable of Wonders (El retablo de las maravillas, 2004).

FURTHER READING


Benito Gómez and Jorge Herreros

CATHELNN NI HOULIHAN

Cathleen ni Houlihan is a political one-act play first performed in St. Teresa’s Hall, Dublin, on April 2, 1902, with Maud Gonne, a famous beauty and anti-British agitator, in the title role. The performance is often taken as the beginning of the Irish National Theatre Society, later located at the Abbey Theatre. It is one of the first Irish plays to depict life in a peasant’s cottage in a fashion that was understood to be neither comic nor sentimental.

The title of the play is one of the traditional names for Ireland, imagined as a woman. It is set at the time of the 1798 rebellion of the United Irishmen against British rule and is located in a peasant’s cottage near the place where French warships arrived to lend assistance to the rebellion. The son of the house, Michael Gillane, is about to be married when an old woman comes to the house. She is a mysterious, pained, and haunting figure. Her four beautiful green fields have been stolen by the stranger, she complains, but she warns that any man who helps her must be prepared to sacrifice everything. Many young men have died for her, many more will; the reward she promises is that they will be remembered forever. This transparent and incendiary allegory is puzzling to the other characters. Although his parents plead with him to stay home, Michael follows the old woman out as in a dream, as news comes that French troops have landed.

Kla Kvan

**DRAGÚN, OSVALDO (1929–1999)**

Osvaldo Dragún is one of the most acclaimed Argentine playwrights of the second half of the 20th century. He was born on May 12, 1929, in San Salvador, Entre Ríos, ARGENTINA. His theatrical vocation manifested itself in his university years. He soon abandoned studies in law and enrolled in the theatrical group Teatro Popular Fray Mocho, with whom he premiered his first plays. As a playwright, Dragún addressed the socioeconomic problems that affected Latin America during his time. Dragún adopted a popular tone influenced by BERTOLT BRECHT and the Theater of the Absurd. However, Dragún has experimented widely with multiple dramatic styles, and thus his works resist simple aesthetic classification.

In his first plays, *The Plague Comes from Melos* (*La peste viene de Melos*, 1956) and *Tupac-Amaru* (1957), Dragún experiments with historical drama, leaving no doubt of his restless preoccupation with social topics. *Histories to Be Counted* (*Historias para ser contadas*, 1957) consists of three small plays; closely influenced by the style of the Italian commedia dell'arte, they expose the conventionalism and injustices of the bourgeois society of his time. In *Miracle in the Old Market* (*Milagro en el Mercado Viejo*, 1963), a tragic one-act influenced by the Argentine genre of the sainete preteño, Dragún explores the field of magic. *Dragún’s Heroic of Buenos Aires* (*Heroica de Buenos Aires*, 1967) is an adaptation of Brecht’s play *MOTHER COURAGE*.

Dragún’s work in the theater is not limited to writing. In 1961 he moved to CUBA to direct and oversee the Cuban theater. He directed two important theatrical enterprises in Havana. First, he was in charge of the Seminario de Autores Dramáticos de La Habana, and years later, in 1988, he became involved with the Escuela Internacional de Teatro para América Latina y el Caribe. These projects proved to be a significant stimulant for Latin American theater, which had suffered at the hands of political dictatorships. The projects resulted in a proposal for theater renovation that attracted massive public support and evolved into new forms of expression that incorporated dance, poetry, and music. As a result of this collective effort, numerous plays by new and established authors came to light, including plays by Dragún, who premiered such plays as *My Dagger and I* (*Mi obelisco y yo*, 1981) and *Today They Eat the Skinny One* (*Hoy se come al flaco*, 1981) at the time.

In 1980, when Argentina’s military government had begun to weaken, Dragún became one of the inspiring leaders of the group Teatro Abierto, the first significant manifestation in the Argentine cultural sphere of an antidictatorship stance. Dragún died in Buenos Aires on June 14, 1999. He had dedicated his life to the theater, a career whose philosophy is perhaps best summed up by an observation he once made: “Theater is like a cork: it always floats. Although everything sinks and nobody throws out a rope, the passion remains alive. That’s why, whether the impetus comes from the independent circles or the official ones, the task is to make sure it remains afloat.” (http://usuarios.lycos.es/eitalc/osvaldo-dragun.htm)

**SELECT PLAYS:** *The Plague Comes from Melos* (*La peste viene de Melos*, 1956); *Tupac-Amaru* (1957); *The Garden of Hell* (*El jardín del infierno*, 1962); *Miracle in the Old Market* (*Milagro en el Mercado Viejo*, 1963); *Heroic of Buenos Aires* (*Heroica de Buenos Aires*, 1967); *History of My Corner* (*Historia de mi esquina*, 1967); *Those of Table 10* (*Los de la mesa 10*, 1967); *Histories to Be Counted* (*Historias para ser contadas*, 1967); *The Dough* (*El amasijo*, 1968); *And They Said That We Would Be Immortal* (*Y nos dijeron que éramos inmortales*, 1968); *Miracle in the Old Market* (*Milagro en el Mercado Viejo*, 1968); *An Accursed Saturday* (*Un maldito domingo*, 1968); *Histories with Jail* (*Historias con cárcel*, 1973); and *By Haves, Is in What Manner Can We Walk?* (*Y por casa, cómo andamos?*, 1980); *My Dagger and I* (*Mi obelisco y yo*, 1981); *Today They Eat the Skinny One* (*Hoy se comen al flaco*, 1981); *Arrive, Heart* (*Arriba, corazón*, 1987); *To Return to Havana* (*Volver a la Habana*, 1990)

**FURTHER READING**


Benito Gómez and Jorge Herrera

**DRAMATIC CRITICISM**

Drama critics might be divided into three categories, according to the amount of time they can devote to assessing a play. Reviewers who write for a daily newspaper must make an instant judgment. Critics who write for a weekly or monthly journal have more time to consider the merits of a play, as well as its failings. They are often selective in the plays they review, and tend to see the play in its cultural context. Then there are the scholars who write for learned journals. Their interests may be very broad or very narrow. They may focus on certain aspects of a particular work or dramatist, or they may set a group of plays in a broader context. And they may have spent months or years formulating their thoughts.

**TYPES OF DRAMATIC CRITICISM**

Reviewers who write for the daily press evaluate the immediate impact of the work. They situate the play in the present and

Cynthia Marsh

GOROSTIZA, CARLOS (1920–2004)

Carlos Gorostiza was born in Buenos Aires, on June 7, 1920. After completing his secondary education he began his artistic career writing poems that appeared in small literary magazines. He was also a puppeteer, an acrobat, and an actor with the theatrical groups La Estrella Grande and La Máscara. From this grass-roots beginning, his relationship with the theater grew into a highly productive career. Critics agree that Gorostiza is the creator of the new Argentine theater that emerged in the 1940s called teatro independiente argentino. He led the generation of new amateur playwrights of his time with his innovative style of realistic theater, which confronted the social and personal topics of everyday life.

The premiere in 1949 of The Bridge (El puente), both written and directed by Gorostiza, set an immediate radical precedent in Argentine theater. Gorostiza featured characters drawn from suburban Buenos Aires. Creating for them personas that were both deeply emotional and rebellious, he was heavily influenced by the theater of MAXIM GORKY and BERLBOYER ANDRE. The paramount importance of The Bridge can perhaps best be appreciated by the fact that, since its premiere, Gorostiza has never stopped directing. The Case about the Man with the Black Suitcase (El caso del hombre de la valija negra, 1951) is a police drama deeply soaked with the realist language of its characters. In Madness’s Bread (El pan de la locura, 1958), Gorostiza returns to the existentialist language that characterized his first play. In The Others (Los prójimos), in the very closed environment of a building, Gorostiza analyzes the evolution of characters confronted with violence and death in the street. This play was awarded the first Premio Nacional de Teatro in 1966.

With the takeover by the military dictatorship (1976–1983), the world of culture in ARGENTINA was subjected to censorship. Argentine playwrights were forced to stretch their ingenuity to dodge the censors. During these sad times, Gorostiza undertook two ambitious and rebellious projects. Between 1976 and 1979, he belonged to the theatrical organization Grupo de Trabajo, an association of playwrights and directors who planned to sustain and develop the Argentine theater. He premiered Madness’s Bread (written in 1958 but premiered in 1976) and The Dear Brothers (1978).

When the dictatorial regime started to weaken in 1980, a group of playwrights, actors, directors, set designers, and critics, including Gorostiza, founded the renowned Teatro Abierto (Open Theater), a resistance movement that aimed to premiere plays by both famous and amateur playwrights. During this time, Gorostiza premiered The Extras (El acompañamiento, 1981). When Argentina adopted democracy, Raúl Alfonsín rose to power (1983–1989), and Gorostiza was named Secretary of Culture. He never stopped writing and directing. One of Gorostiza’s most recently renowned plays, Airplanes (Aeroplanos, 1989), explores the human language.

Carlos Gorostiza has also excelled in other literary genres. In 1999, he won the Premio Planeta (one of SPAIN’S most prestigious awards given to novels written in Spanish) for his novel Vuelan las palomas. Other significant novels written by Gorostiza include Cuerpos presentes (1981), El bisural (1985), and La buena gente (2001).

SELECT PLAYS: The Bridge (El puente, 1949); The Case about the Man with the Black Suitcase (El caso del hombre de la valija negra, 1951); Baldrick’s Watch (El relaj de Baldrick, 1953); The Enchanted Cave (La cueva encantada, 1956); Madness’s Bread (El pan de la locura, 1958); Living Here (Vivir aquí, 1964); The Others (Los prójimos, 1966); What Are We Playing? (¿A qué jugamos?, 1969); The Dear Brothers (Los hermanos queridos, 1978); The Extras (El acompañamiento, 1981); We Must Put Out the Fire (Hagamos el fuego, 1982); Daddy (Daddy, 1983); The Red Suit (El frac rojo, 1988); Airplanes (Aeroplanos, 1990)

FURTHER READING


Benito Gómez and Jorge Hierro

GOSET See MOSCOW STATE YIDDISH THEATRE

GOW, MICHAEL (1955–)

Michael Gow was born in Sydney, New South Wales, on February 14, 1955, and was educated at the University of Sydney, where he became a member of the Sydney University Dramatic Society. He is one of Australia’s most prominent contemporary playwrights and has worked as a director in major state theater companies.

A string of successful plays written during the 1980s and 1990s were received favorably by both audiences and critics. Away (1986) is one of the most often performed contemporary Australian plays; it is Gow’s most awarded play and is widely studied. It examines the peculiarly Australian ritual of the annual Christmas summer holiday at the beach, using this background to
respect him. He favors whiskey over beer, sailing ships over steamers, and home over the forecastle. He has no patience with class consciousness and “Salvation Army-Socialist bull.”

On the promenade deck, Mildred describes herself as “a waste product in the Bessemer process,” the wealthy granddaughter of a steel baron who uses her influence to insist on a tour of the stokehole. The heat of the furnaces quickly melts her arrogance, and as Yank rails against the officer who blows the signal whistle, beating his chest like a gorilla, she whimpers, “Oh, the filthy beast!”

Back in the forecastle, Yank ponders what he senses is a profound insult, and another man suggests that she reacted as though she’d seen a hairy ape escaped from the zoo. Yank embraces the name, but he resolves to confront the “skool” that gave it to him.

Yank undertakes a journey through New York, outraging the Fifth Avenue gentility, crossing the membership of the waterfront office of the International Workers of the World, and finishing at the zoo, where he frees a gorilla that crushes him to death. Yank insists on the validity and primacy of sheer power: steel, dynamite, and the engines that drive the ships. Yet he searches for a way to “belong,” to fit in, and as he dies in the gorilla cage, the directions read, “And, perhaps, the Hairy Ape after all belongs.”

In O’Neill’s vision, the machine inevitably uses people and so reduces them to cogs; his is a highly deterministic perspective that leaves little room for hope or freedom.

Stark Young called the play “a fine example of dramatic rhythm” (Houchin, 1993) and Alexander Woolcott described it as “a bitter, brutal wildly fantastic play of nightmare hue and nightmare distortion” (Miller, 1965).

[See also United States, 1860–1920]

**Further Reading**


Jeffrey D. Mason

**Halac, Ricardo (1935–)**

Ricardo Halac was born in Buenos Aires in 1935 and grew to become a highly prominent figure in the Argentine theater of the dictatorial period, 1976 to 1983. He addresses the social anguish and feeling of failure experienced by the Argentine people in 1973 during the disappointing period of Peronismo and the war d’etat that occurred a few years later in 1976. Halac criticizes the middle class for lacking a vision of the future and for holding an individualistic conception of success.

His theater introduced an aesthetic debate about deconstruction in the social sector. The theater, according to Halac, must construct a polyvalent world in which society changes according to a level of fair and egalitarian values. Halac was influenced by Bertolt Brecht’s didactic sense of theater. Brecht exercised a tremendous influence in Halac after they met in 1957 in Berlin, where Halac studied on a grant from the Goethe Institute. Artistically, Halac also breaks with the “initiative logic” or realistic strategy of the theater that preceded him and, through playful dialogue, elevates his own theater to a new artistic level.

Initially considered part of a reflexive, social Realism movement, Halac started to win recognition in Argentina in 1961 with his first play, Los Inocentes para Cuatro. He progressively evolved toward a more critical social realism, with his two plays, End of December (Fin de Diciembre, 1965) and Star of Dawn (Estrella de Madrugada, 1965), borrowing from traditional and modern theatrical genres such as the Theater of the Absurd, Expressionism, and the Spanish Sainete. His main contribution resides in his idea of criticizing the social concerns by invoking the grotesco criollo, a grotesque interpretation of Argentine contemporary society.

Halac was very active in the 1970s. In 1971 he began writing for the leftist newspaper La Opinion in addition to plays and novels. In 1975 he became involved in the visual media, adapting to the screen his own novel, The Single Man (El soltero, 1977), a metaphor of freedom. After he filmed the movie and appeared on a television program, he received a death threat and emigrated to Mexico.

Halac’s play El Niño (El destete, 1977), which premiered in 1978, reveals the failure of his generation to stop the ascension to power of the right-wing dictatorship. The political dimension of life during this period, “the process,” is revealed in A Wonderful Job (Un trabajo fabuloso, 1978), a harsh and realistic play about a father forced to prostitute himself as a transvestite. From this time forward, Halac’s works became an inspiration to groups like Teatro Abierto, which Halac helped create and develop. It grew into a cultural movement that worked successfully to undermine the dictatorship and to encourage the ideal of democracy. The Argentine government censored Halac’s 1982 play, El Silo: Pearl (La perla del piano), for its criticism of the dictatorship. During this time, Halac also wrote Noite de Brotouelo, Chirio (Ruido de Rotas Cadenas, 1989), which speaks about the new class of poor
HALAC, RICARDO (1935–)

Ricardo Halac was born in Buenos Aires in 1935 and grew
to become a highly prominent figure in the Argentine
television scene of the 1950s and 1960s. He
played the character of Alejandro
González in the telenovela "La Luna
Enamorada," which ran from 1953 to 1957.

His acting career spans a number of
films and television shows, including
"La Firma," "La Casa de las Doncellas," and
"El Secreto de la Luna," for which he
won a Premio Breitling. Halac's
work has been recognized not only in
Argentina but also internationally,
with a number of his films selected
for international film festivals.

In addition to his acting career,
Halac is also a writer and has
published several books,
including "El Secreto de la Luna,"
which was released in 1989.

Halac's career has been
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Rodolfo de Angelis that set out to bring every element of debate, novelty, and surprise from the stage to the audience and subsequently to the streets, with the aim of making an indelible mark on the public consciousness. By 1921, however, futurist theater had found itself diluted by new voices, including Luigi Pirandello, Luigi Antonelli, and Rosso di San Secondo.

With the advent of second futurism in the late 1920s and 1930s, the creative strength of the movement was compromised due to Marinetti’s ambivalent attitude toward fascism under Benito Mussolini. The novelty and freshness of the Italian avant-garde and its influence on European culture faded away during the course of World War II, ending with Marinetti’s death in 1944 more than three decades after the publication of “The Variety Theatre Manifesto.”

SELECT PLAYS: The Woman Is Fickle (La donna è mobile, 1909); Electricity (Elettricità, 1913); Zang Tumb Tumb (1914); Synthetic Theater (Teatro Sintetico, 1915–1916); Theater of Surprise (Teatro della Sorpresa, 1921); The Fire Drum (Il tamburo di fuoco, 1922); Prisoners (Prigionieri, 1925); Volcano (Vulcano, 1926); The Ocean of the Heart (Lucano del cuore, 1927); The Prisoners and the Love (I prigionieri e l’amor, 1927); Fast Lights (Luci veloci, 1929); The Prompter Kneel (Il suggeritore nudo, 1929); Simultaneous One (Simultanea, 1931)

FURTHER READING

Daria Valentini

MARRIED TO A CELESTIAL LADY
Married to a Celestial Lady (Tianxian pei, Huangmei xi) by Lu Hongfei is the most famous example of an opera style called Huangmei xi (Huangmei opera), which takes its name from its place of origin Huangmei in eastern Hubei Province on the border with Anhui. Huangmei opera is currently most popular in Anhui Province.

Originally a small-scale folk style, Huangmei opera was first brought to Shanghai in the early 1930s. Its heyday was the 1950s, when significant numbers of professional companies and a training system were established, old artists assisted with the rearrangement of traditional items, and scenery was added to performances of items like Married to a Celestial Lady. The Chinese Cultural Revolution led to the virtual suspension of Huangmei opera, but it was restored afterward, with fifty-three professional companies operating in 1983. Although the style retains a following, modernization has led to its decline.

According to tradition, the repertoire of the early Huangmei operas was small, with only thirty-six major items and seventy-two minor ones. After 1949, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) organized Huangmei opera artists to rearrange some of these items to remove the factors they found politically unacceptable and give play to those the CCP favored, such as showing the poor in a favorable light. The CCP also had some new items written to show contemporary life in ways it favored.

Married to a Celestial Lady was among the traditional items. Awarded the first prize in the East China Festival of Tradition Dramas in 1954 and 1955, it is a fairy story based on the historical character Dong Yong of the second century c.e., famed for his filial piety, and has existed in many versions and in many different regional styles.

In the story, Dong Yong is unable to pay for his dead father’s funeral, so he borrows the necessary money on condition that he becomes his creditor’s slave for three years. The Jade Emperor’s Seventh Daughter sympathizes with his plight; she secretly comes to earth and marries him, arranging with the creditor for repayment in embroidery. She weaves enough in one night to enable Dong Yong to shorten his enslavement from three years to a hundred days. However, with the period over, the Jade Emperor forces his daughter to return to heaven, leaving Dong and Seventh Daughter devastated at being compelled to part.

Lu’s rearrangement of the piece eliminates the element of destiny and strengthens the hostility to the feudal system of society by showing the tragedy of separation of lovers who have come together not by parents’ arrangement but by choice. In older versions, Dong Yong eventually marries the daughter of the family that has enslaved him, but this is removed in the new version. The characterization of the Seventh Daughter brings out her strength as a woman, while Dong Yong is shown as a loyal and pure peasant, both on the side of the people.

[See also China]

FURTHER READING

Colin Mackerras

MARTÍNEZ SIERRA, GREGORIO (1881–1947)
Gregorio Martínez Sierra was a renowned playwright, director, and producer of early-20th-century theater in Spain. His career as a playwright started in 1909 with The Shadow of the Father (La sombra del padre). Two years later, Martínez Sierra wrote his most
celebrated play, Credle song (Canción de cuna, 1911). Later on he not only wrote but also proceeded to direct and produce his own work. Other significant plays by Martínez Sierra include Mother (Madre, 1912), Madame Pepita (1912), Daum (Amancier, 1915), Rosina Is Frugill (Rosina es frugil, 1918), Dream of One Night in August (Sueño de una noche de agosto, 1920), Don Juan of Spain (Don Juan de España, 1921), and Triangulo (Triángulo, 1930).

A cultivated intellectual with a humanist background, Martínez Sierra married María O. Lejárraga in 1900. They did not have any children, a significant detail in view of the fact that his plays deal mostly with femininity and maternity. According to different critics (Patricia O’Connor, Alda Blanco, and Antonia Rodrigo), María actively collaborated, to put it euphemistically, in the writing of the majority of the plays attributed to Gregorio. He was directly involved in the publication of many literary magazines, such as Vida Moderna (1901), Hélicos (1903), and Renacimiento (1907). Thereafter, he continuously toured the most important Spanish and Latin American cities with his company. In 1917 Martínez Sierra founded a publishing company, Estrella.

On September 24, 1916, a play written by Martínez Sierra titled The Kingdom of God (El reino de Dios) premiered in his Eslava Theater in Madrid. This premiere was the beginning of a campaign called "Teatro de Arte" that would completely change the way theatrical staging was done in Spain. Martínez Sierra directed and produced his own plays, as well as works by classical and romantic writers and by contemporary European dramatists. He also helped premire new performances of plays by consecrated Spanish authors as well as helped launch the careers of promising new playwrights.

Martínez Sierra's most important contribution to Spanish literature harks back to his roles as director and producer, for in these capacities he exercised a tremendous influence. As a playwright he contributed little to the renovation of the theater. His comedies have been classified as conventional and soft, charged with excessive sentimentalism. They portray a cheerful and friendly vision of the world in which characters, moved by noble feelings, are inclined to act in a generous way. Nevertheless, the predominance of roles for women in his plays helped expose the female side of social reality in his day. The woman is portrayed as victim and redeemer of masculine power, while the role of mother is always a dignified one in his works. This feminine perspective is inherent in plays like Mother and Credle Song, a work that shows the maternal instinct that emerge when some nuns unwittingly adopt a baby girl. Through the protagonist of The Master of the House (El amo de la casa), Martínez Sierra—or should we say María Martínez Sierra?—intertwines femininity and maternity, thereby affirming that woman and mother are one and the same.

SELECT PLAYS: The Shadow of the Father (La sombra del padre, 1909); Credle Song (Canción de cuna, 1911); Madame Pepita (1912); Mother (Madre, 1912); Daum (Amancier, 1915); Rosina Is Frugill (Rosina es frugil, 1918); Dream of One Night in August (Sueño de una noche de agosto, 1920); Don Juan of Spain (Don Juan de España, 1921); Triangulo (Triángulo, 1930).

FURTHER READING

Benito Gómez and Jorge Herrera

MARY NO KUBI! See HEAD OF MARY

MARY QUEEN OF SCOTS GOT HER HEAD CHOPPED OFF

I ask you, what’s a queen a queen
And when’s a queen just a wummin?
—La Corbie, Act 1

Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off is one of Scottish poet and playwright Liz Lochhead’s most popular plays. Commissioned by the Communicado Theatre Company to mark the 400th anniversary of the death of Mary Stuart, it was first performed at the 1987 Edinburgh Festival, where it won a Scotsman Fringe First Award.

As the title suggests, the play is about Mary Queen of Scots (1542–1587), in history usually presented as a romantically tragic figure, and the suffering heroine of, for example, Friedrich Schiller’s play Marie Stuart (1800). Lochhead steps away from the popular myth and emphasizes the subjective and constructive nature of historical narrative. Accordingly, she has the chorus-figure La Corbie announce that the setting is Scotland but that “it depends... Ah dinna ken whet like your Scotland is / Here’s mines.”

The play begins with La Corbie cracking her whip and bringing the historically based characters of Mary, Elizabeth, Darnley, Bothwell, Riccio, and Knox onto stage like animals into a circus arena. The following two acts cover the major events in Mary’s life, from the rivalry between her and Queen Elizabeth of England and her struggle with the authoritarian Protestant reformer John Knox, to her marriage with Lord Darnley, the birth of their son James VI, her affair with David Riccio, and finally, her dissatrious alliance with Bothwell and the events leading to her imprisonment and execution.

Interestingly, Queen Mary’s ending, ironically referred to in the title and especially familiar to Lochhead’s Scottish audiences, is not played out. Instead, the final scene illustrates the story’s modern bearing by transforming the characters of Elizabeth and
with Porgy and contributes to the "saucer" burial fund and to
singing the spirituals.

Soon Porgy tells Bess, "You is my woman now" and with Maria
persuades her to go along to picnic on Kittiwah Island without
him. There Crown draws Bess into the palmettos. A week later
Porgy prays and conjures to cure the still feverish, delicious Bess.
He promises he will not let Crown "handle" her with his "hot han[ds]." The hurricane bell sounds. Terrified residents gather to
withstand the "Judgment Day" storm with "shoutings" and spiri-
tuals. Crown knocks like Death and barges in, taunting God and
Porgy with nasty humor. Clara, spotting Jake's capsized boat,
gives Bess their baby and rushes out. Bess's challenge, "Ain't dere
no man here?" sends Crown out after her.

When Crown returns for Bess, Porgy kills him. Summoned to
identify Crown, Porgy expects the corpse to bleed in its killer's
presence. In novel and play, he tries to flee the police in his goat
cart. Later learning that Bess left for New York with Sporting
Life, in play and libretto Porgy sets out after her in his pathetic
cart.

From the era of blackface COMEDY and few serious roles
for black actors, Heyward's large-cast plays of Porgy and Bess
portray one vital primitive community that resists the incurs-
ows of a dominant alien society with resilient dignity. While
Duke Ellington debunked the "laurelblack Negroisms" and
questioned the fit of such "grand music and a swell play," (Mor-
row, 1935)" history has recognized a "masterpiece of American
musical theater." Heyward's public sympathy and "understanding"
kept pace with and contributed to white America's slow racial progress.

[See also United States]

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John C. Kuhn

POSIBILISMO AND IMPOSIBILISMO

The concepts of posibilismo (possibilism) and imposibilismo (impos-
sibilism) hark back to a polemic emerged around 1960 between
the two playwrights who initiated a radical change in the post-
civil war Spanish theater: ANTONIO BUERO VALLEJO and
ALFONSO SATRE. The realist aesthetic proved well suited to
the desire of these authors to express an imaginary world that is at
the same time profoundly realistic, allowing the use of realist
language to convey highly artistic and ideological concepts.
Right away a controversy arose between the two supporters of
the committed realist theater about the way to denounce the
unjust situation in post–civil war SPAIN. Buero, the representa-
tive of posibilismo, tried in a subtle, indirect way that would take
advantage of any oversight by the censors to defend freedom and
protest the dictatorship. Sastre, on the other hand, represents
imposibilismo because he altogether rejected the strategy of refer-
ing to Spanish reality in an indirect way. Sastre imbued some of
his plays with Marxist ideals—which, to his mind, made them
an instrument of revolutionary action. Thus, his plays attempt to
do more than represent life or inspire thought. Sastre's plays
aimed to incite action.

Numerous authors abandoned their efforts to fight for a
different theater. However, the ones that persevered did so with
a passionate critical spirit. The different approaches reflected a
polemic about submission or resistance to the rules imposed by
the system, a polemic that reached its boiling point in 1960
when Sastre published the article "Teatro imposible y pacto
social" (Impossible Theater and Social Pact). In the article,
Sastre accuses the playwrights Alfonso Paso and Buero Vallejo
of conforming to the rules imposed by the control mechanisms of
the regime. Indeed, Alfonso kept himself aligned with the pacto
social (social pact of some intellectuals with the regime) and
was able to premiere numerous plays. Buero soon replied to Sas-
tre in another article, "Obligada precisión acerca del 'imposibili-
smo.'" ( Forced Precision About "Imposibilismo" [1960]), argu-
ing that there is no such thing as an impossible theater because
everything is possible, unless there is a concrete physical obsta-
cle to its realization. Buero concludes that Spain, especially at
this time, needed a theater of the possible. He advocated a com-
mitted, risky form of theater that found its way not only into
scripts but also into performances for the public.

The impact of this academic discussion was so great that the
debate between posibilismo and imposibilismo has become an
intrinsic part of the history of 20th-century Spanish theater. The
importance of these different attitudes toward theater is rein-
forced by the fact that the authors identified above played a major
role in changing the outlook of post–civil war Spanish theater
and also because 1960 marked the birth of a new generation of
playwrights, who were thoroughly affected by this polemic.
They would soon embrace the commitment and social protest
inherited from their realist predecessors and suffer the conse-
quences when theater houses refused to present their plays
because of their realist charged content.

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Jorge Herreros and Benito Gómez

POSTMODERNISM

Postmodernism has been theorized as a “condition” that led to various cultural, social, and artistic movements. In the sense that it is a “condition,” postmodernism refers to the period of late capitalism directly following modernism. Hence, postmodernism might be thought of as a total rejection of the values of modernism. Postmodernism has sometimes been called “antimodernism.”

However, “antimodernism” implies a logical progress to history, and it was Jean-François Lyotard (1984) who signaled the beginning of postmodernism in his rejection of “grand narratives”—sometimes called master narratives—or the teleological progression of history. Lyotard saw the postmodern not as a rejection of modernism but as a deepening of modernism’s unanswered questions. His critique of history also exposed the dramaturgical structure involved in the writing of history, particularly in conservative Marxism, which implies an ending point to history—part and parcel of the Enlightenment project.

Instead of an end point to history, postmodernism often sees repetition and reiteration as the only certainty. As Herbert Blau (1992) writes, “If we can believe the history of modernism, we are living in the double bind, the history that always repeats itself.” For postmodern playwright Suzan-Lori Parks, history is condemned to repetition, what she calls in her AMERICA PLAY “the great hole of history.” This repetition is often termed pastiche, a form used because “the producers of culture have nowhere to turn but to the past: the imitation of dead styles,” according to Frederic Jameson (1991), “or to the radical cannibalization of the past.” The Wooster Group’s L.S.D. (Just the High Points) (1985) is a clear example of pastiche, in that the piece collided Timothy Leary’s psychoactive drug experiments with Arthur Miller’s THE CRUCIBLE to explore both Leary and John Proctor (the protagonist of The Crucible) as scapegoats of their culture. L.S.D. grew doubly ironic when Miller threatened to sue the Wooster Group for unauthorized use of his play.

In his (re)making project (1992–present), Charles Mee uses the repetition of history as a starting point, and he begins with ancient Greek plays and rewrites them to include the language of popular culture. He also does not claim ownership of his plays but invites others to rewrite them by making them available on the Internet. This impulse might derive from Roland Barthes’s 1968 essay “The Death of the Author,” which he believed signaled “the birth of the reader.” The ideology of absolute truth and authorial ownership had been erased.

Postmodern German playwright Heiner Müller embraced this concept in his rewrite of Hamlet, titled HAMLETMACHINE (1977), which climaxes in an actress burning a picture of the author. In her 1983 essay “The Death of Character,” Blinor Fuchs points to an American postmodernism that moves away from the psychological realism of characters and toward a new space where theater itself becomes self-referential. Postmodernism signals the proliferation of identities, a sense of history as repetition, which is often expressed as pastiche, and a movement away from Enlightenment values into a space where personal experience is valued over cultural hierarchies.

(See also Deconstruction; Foreman, Richard; Identity Theater; Interculturalism; Performance Art; Performance Studies; Philosophy and Drama)

FURTHER READING


Kara Reilly

THE POWER OF DARKNESS

The Power of Darkness (Vlast' i tmy), a naturalistic play in five acts by Lyov Tolstoy, was written in 1886 and published the following year; but because of its uncompromising treatment of murder, adultery, and infanticide, it was banned from