

of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign, for example, includes the biographies of thirty-three faculty, less than a half-dozen of whom are publishing scholars of drama and theater history. At Indiana, which a generation ago boasted one of the most distinguished faculties of drama and theater history in the country, a faculty of twenty-five in Theater, Drama, and Contemporary Dance includes only three Ph.D.- holders, one of whom was a visitor until this past year. In fact, the graduate populations of Ph.D. programs in drama and theater are in such significant decline at some institutions that many surely will not survive. Another way of saying this is that unlike the consolidations I spoke of a moment ago, a strategy of centralizing cognate disciplines, drama study has moved—often perilously so—in an opposite, decentralized direction on many campuses (which is one reason why so many visitors and adjuncts work in arts departments of all varieties). The very first bullet point trumpeting the attractions of the Illinois Ph.D. program in Theater Studies make this pattern obvious: Doctoral students will realize “opportunities to work with theater faculty affiliates across the campus.”

These two points lead inexorably to this question: “Where will drama be taught on the twenty-first-century college and university campus?” The answer might be “Everywhere—or nowhere.” Teachers and scholars of drama *need* performance, but can it really be the case that serious directors, actors, or designers do not need drama? Of course they do. The Illinois website declares, “We Make Theater Makers.” And, as the associate dean for the School of Art, Architecture + Design at Indiana the past two years, I can echo this sentiment. We embrace makers of all kinds: from those who work in costume shops to those who require increasingly sophisticated fabrication technologies. But where will the serious study of drama be—where will it exist—in this new culture of making?

Publishing and *Modern Drama*

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On July 1, 2014, I became the editor of *Modern Drama* and began reading submissions for my first issue, published in the autumn of 2015. To commemorate this new beginning, I prepared some prescriptive remarks about the kind of work I hoped to showcase in the journal, published in *Modern Drama* 58, no. 3. What I was seeking, I declared, was criticism that put aside, even showed the

irrelevance of, the disciplinary divide between drama and theater: work that moved effortlessly between close analysis of a play and close analysis of the ways in which that play had been actualized in performance, with the particular emphases or this or that cast, design team, and director. I made a case for the consonance of literary and theater-historical analyses, noting that book history was entwined with theater history, which returns us again and again to the possibilities and limitations of whatever material context—and noting, too, that the language of citation and iteration, so frequently invoked in performance studies, returns us again to textual criticism and literary theory. To ignore certain contextual elements of a performance—the way it responds to or reacts against not only a play’s previous performances but also a play’s critical backstory—is to “cheat the play of its own history,” I wrote (292).

Over two years and 250 submissions later, I am pleased with the work that has appeared in the journal in the twelve issues now in print or in various stages of production under my direction. Some of the pieces I’ve published find precisely the balance I encouraged: for instance, Joseph Cermatori’s work on Gertrude Stein (2015) or Soyica Diggs Colbert’s on Lynn Nottage (2016) or Kellen Hoxworth’s on *The Book of Mormon* (2017). But I am struck by the fact that the journal hasn’t published all that much scholarship that resembles what I hoped it would be publishing. We have received plenty of submissions from theater scholars, both junior and senior, that attend to plays as artifacts of past performances or blueprints for future ones, but focused attention on the play’s language is more often than not lacking. We have received many more submissions from literature scholars that attend to playwrights as if they were Conrad or Pound, with a striking lack of awareness that “My Last Duchess” would signify differently if it were played by a specific performer or written for a particular playing space. I don’t want to suggest that there is only one way to write dramatic criticism or to suggest that this way is on the decline. Indeed, I would note that, as a perusal of other commentary by editors back to A. C. Edwards in 1958 has taught me, *Modern Drama* seems perennially to be looking for the same thing, which has been found only occasionally during the journal’s six decades (see, for example, Ackerman 2006, 3–4; Knowles 2000, 526–27). An article by Marvin Carlson, published in the journal in 2007, castigated *Modern Drama* for not providing “a more significant sampling of studies based . . . on thoughtful and provocative theatrical embodiments” (497). But Carlson forgets that, despite a robust submission base and an acceptance rate that averages 15 percent, our journal like any other is shaped by the material the field’s scholars send it.

And so I am less certain about the demise of drama than I am about the seeming intractability of certain methodological divides. These divides have been enshrined in disciplinary distinctions and forged in disciplinary

skirmishes, as Shannon Jackson has detailed in her book *Professing Performance* (2004). At my home institution, York University, I teach partially in the Department of English and partially in the Program in Theater and Performance Studies, two academic units that are housed in entirely different faculties: Liberal Arts, in one case, and Fine Arts, in the other. In my graduate courses, which are cross-listed, I am always struck by the two solitudes that face one another on the first day of classes. If you will permit the character sketch, no doubt as exaggerated as it is uncharitable, my graduate students in theater often arrive convinced that plays are a relic of a politically retrograde time, just another tool of hegemony to keep a populace docile until they are well and fully liberated by this spontaneous flash-mob or that unscripted performance event. My graduate students in English typically arrive more open to dramatic literature, which they come prepared dutifully to submit to whatever literary-theoretical paradigm they will “apply” as a “lens” (a formulation that has always defeated my imagination); words such as “stage left” or “scrim” are foreign to them.

To be fair to both groups, we find common ground quickly enough, and the work these students produce looks much like the work I want to see in *Modern Drama*, and sometimes do. Last year in the journal, we published an article on African American radio drama by a theater scholar whose work I shaped by insisting he focus his historical analysis on a close reading of a particular script. And we are publishing at least two articles by literature scholars whose articles found sharper focus when I gave them specific productions to consider. I don’t mean to sound polemical or prescriptive beyond my roles as an editor of one journal and teacher at one institution. But I am perplexed at how two populations have been trained in such markedly different ways that common ground and even common vocabulary need to be established in the first place—especially when I consider that the persistent methodological entrenchments that separate the two camps predate the birth of *Modern Drama* sixty years ago.

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Drama Drama, or How the Stage Might Rise Again

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It would seem that we are assembled here for the melancholy task of sifting the dying embers of the sun from which we all took nourishment. But as a Shakespearean who has managed to survive the global festivities of the 400th Deathaversary year, I feel fairly sanguine about the prospects of a field or form that is moribund. Dead things are never dead in academia and performance—they pop back up after a certain term, reiterating themselves in ways we don't always anticipate and don't always love. And so I think that it will be with drama, which has always had a volatile departmental structure, as W. B. Worthen has chronicled. It may be unsustainable in its present university form, given dropping Humanities enrollments and the undelimited remit of its sometime coupling with Performance Studies, but drama will doubtless endure as an object of study in many quarters of the university. Less certain is whether it will retain the features that command our interest and/or love.

The question that I find especially pressing, if it is indeed possible to make some dent on the shape of drama's posthumous apparition, is what might be done to address the asymmetries of the field. This is an old refrain, but newly interesting to me from my vantage as the director of a Digital Arts and Humanities Institute at a Big 10 University. Here are some points that I think should be borne in mind as we contemplate what Theater might be in a university climate of rampant attenuation—under the mandate that we do ever more with ever less.

1. There is an awkward stalemate at present between the ontological disposition of performance—specifically, that theatrical performance happens only in the ever-fleeing present of the live event—and the dissemination of prestige theater and opera 'livecast' productions that trickle down to the geographically and fiscally challenged, pre-ratified