CONDUCTING A PEDAGOGY:

THE INFLUENCE OF MARIA IRENE FORNES'S TEACHING AND THE PADUA HILLS PLAYWRIGHTS WORKSHOP AND FESTIVAL ON THREE CONTEMPORARY WOMEN PLAYWRIGHTS

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by

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To the memory of my brother.

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ABSTRACT

In some circles, Maria Irene Fornes is as hallowed for her playwriting pedagogy as she is for her plays. Over the years, she developed a series of exercises and a method of presentation to guide students in what she described as "creating life." Many of these exercises were honed in various workshops including the legendary Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival under the direction of playwright Murray Mednick, whose pedagogical philosophy closely matched that of Fornes. In an effort to assess the broader implications of their combined approach to playwriting and its long-term effect on American theatre, this dissertation examines the impact of this playwriting pedagogy on the careers of three women playwrights, all alumnae of the Padua Hills Playwrights' Workshop and Festival, ultimately revealing how, as with Aristotle, teachers beget disciples who beget converts and so on, exponentially, ensuring the endurance of this unique approach to playwriting and the survival of the art.

CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION

Statement of Purpose

In this dissertation, I examine the pedagogy of master playwright, director, teacher, and mentor, Maria Irene Fornes, and that of the legendary Workshop and Festival under the direction of playwright Murray Mednick, specifically exploring the influence of their teaching on three contemporary West Coast Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival alumnae: Cheryl Slean, Ki Gottberg, and myself.

Maria Irene Fornes is, in some circles, as hallowed for her playwriting pedagogy as she is for her plays. During her forty-year career, she developed a series of playwriting exercises and a method of presentation that included Yoga postures and meditation techniques designed to guide her playwriting students in what she described as "learning how to create life."[1] Many of these exercises were honed in her famous International Arts Relations Hispanic Writers-in Residence Workshop (INTAR) at the Hispanic Cultural Center in New York which spawned a

[1] Andréa J. Onstad, ***Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival Notebook*** (unpublished, 1991), 1.

generation of brilliant Hispanic talent including 2003 Pulitzer Prize winner Nilo Cruz; Cherríe Moraga, co-editor of ***This Bridge Called My Back: Writings of Radical Women of Color;***[2] Migdalia Cruz, author of ***Miriam's Flowers;***[3] Caridad Svich, proclaimed by San Francisco Playwright Foundation artistic director Amy Mueller to be "the national Fornes expert";[4] and a host of others. While these luminaries have drawn scholarly attention to the INTAR lab and to themselves, scant regard has been given the countless others influenced by Fornes whom she taught in venues outside of INTAR, away from New York City--places such as the Bay Area Playwrights Festival, West Coast Playwrights, Latin American Writers' Workshop (a non-exclusive, diverse entity), and the Padua Hills Playwrights' Workshop and Festival, many of which have been abandoned or morphed into other organizations.

The Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival that Cheryl Slean, Ki Gottberg, and I attended at intersecting times was a unique workshop/festival debuting in July of

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[2] Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds., ***This Bridge Called My Back: Writings of Radical Women of Color***, 2nd ed. (New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press, 1983).

[3] Migdalia Cruz, ***Miriam's Flowers*** (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1990).

[4] Amy Mueller, E-Mail to Andréa J. Onstad, Subject: ***Fornes Article***, 20 November 2005.

1978 under the leadership of Murray Mednick at the Southern California University of LaVerne, which both funded and hosted the inaugural event. The workshop was resurrected nearly every summer thereafter at varying Southern California campuses until its demise in 1995 due to lack of funding. It was jointly created by the University of LaVerne's Director of Theatre at the time, John Woodruff, its instructor of playwriting and dramaturgy, Murray Mednick, already an Obie award-winning playwright as well as former co-director of Theater Genesis, along with five other playwrights, one of whom was Maria Irene Fornes. Mednick was the key figure in the emergence of Padua and its development into a long-term theatrical presence. Without him, Padua would never have happened.

Regardless of physical changes in venue, personnel, and funding throughout its eighteen years of existence, the general format of Padua remained the same. The core invited playwrights developed and presented new work for site specific outdoor locations and led writing workshops for a handful of student playwrights who assisted in the outside productions. Initially less than a month long, the workshop/festival grew into a seven-week playwriting extravaganza culminating in a public presentation of the

guest artists' work. Though the work was presented *enfin* to the public, process was prized over product. Playwriting students worked side-by-side with the guest artists in various capacities--assistant director, actor, stage manager, technician--whatever was needed. As an experimental, experiential theatre laboratory, Padua had no peer.

Throughout its existence, Mednick made certain that the workshop/festival adhered to its mission of ". . . examine[ing] the creative processes of playwriting and playmaking, especially with regard to the awareness of space and . . . continue[ing] to evolve new methods of teaching the art."[5] It was lauded for fostering "some of theatre's most progressive writers"[6] and considered by many to be the "premier workshop in the United States for the development of new playwrights and original voices."[7] For Maria Irene Fornes, Padua provided a unique venue of experimentation, a place to explore beyond the confining walls of Off-Off-Broadway's tiny theatre spaces, allowing

[5] Murray Mednick, "Statement of Purpose: The Padua Hills Playwrights' Workshop," in ***Plays from Padua Hills 1982***, ed., Murray Mednick (Claremont, CA: Pomona College Theater Department, 1982), 165.

[6] Luis Reyes, "Padua Comes Inside to Play," ***American Theatre*** 18, no. 4 (April 2001): 9

[7] Michael Farkash, "17-Year-Old Padua Fest Closes Due to Financial Woes," ***Back Stage*** 36, no. 50 (15 December 1995): 3.

her painterly theatrical visions to explode on the vast outdoor canvas before reining them in for the tighter indoor fit back in New York City. Fornes attended the Padua Festival at least twelve times, developing new plays during eleven of these magical summers. She attributed the time spent re-exploring space as liberating her work, allowing it to launch her most important plays. In her own words she stated, "There's more freedom and initiative to experiment [t]here than anywhere."[8]

This liberating effect permeated veteran playwriting teachers and students alike, some returning year after year. Teaching was considered noble, creative, and an art in itself[9] with as much experimentation encouraged in playwriting pedagogy as in the plays and productions. Maria Irene Fornes, already experimenting with her Method-based exercises, along with Murray Mednick, emerged as much beloved teachers whose classes even the veteran playwrights attended.[10]

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[8] Maria Irene Fornes, quoted in Maryl Jo Fox, "Stage Hand," ***LA Weekly*** (21-27 July 1989), 33; quoted in Caridad Svich, "Conducting a Life: A Tribute to Maria Irene Fornes," in Maria M. Delgado and Caridad Svich, eds., ***Conducting a Life: Reflections on the Theatre of Maria Irene Fornes*** (Lyme, NH: Smith and Kraus, Inc., 1999), xxiv.

[9] Mednick, Statement of Purpose, 165.

[10] John O'Keefe began writing his play, ***Mimzabim***, in a Fornes class at the 1985 Padua workshop in which she instructed the students

Cheryl Slean, writer, director, and producer, now based in Seattle, was a student at Padua in 1988 and 1989 and Managing Director from 1990 to 1993. Ki Gottberg, full professor of theatre at Seattle University, attended Padua for several years and was a student coordinator in 1991. I attended Padua in 1991, three years after obtaining an MFA from the Iowa Playwrights Workshop.

Countless discussions with Gottberg and Slean revealed a common bond regarding the influence of Padua and Fornes on each individual's artistic growth. Padua's whirling pool of creativity proved a pivotal experience for all of us, with Maria Irene Fornes's and Murray Mednick's workshops benchmarks in exploding ideas of playwriting pedagogy. The influence reached far into the future, permanently shaping our dramatic aesthetic in both playwriting and teaching.

Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Paula Vogel summed up Fornes's influence for interviewer Don Shewey in the November 9, 1999 issue of *The Advocate*: "In the work of every American playwright at the end of the 20th century, there are only two stages: before he or she has read Maria

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to think about a set and then put two people in it. John O'Keefe, Telephone Interview with Andréa J. Onstad, 14 October 2006.

Irene Fornes and after."[11] One could consider doubling this impact for playwrights who studied playwriting with Maria Irene Fornes and tripling it for playwrights who studied with her and Mednick under the creative umbrella of the Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival.

I provide a brief background on the various components and players in this dissertation as I ask:

- what is/was the influence of Maria Irene Fornes's innovative pedagogical strategies and The Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival's playwriting pedagogical demands on the work of three contemporary women playwrights who studied with Fornes at this experimental venue

while keeping in mind a deeper, underlying concern:

- how does playwriting pedagogy in general affect the state of dramatic art?

My goal is to demonstrate that there has been not only a temporary influence but a lifelong shift in dramatic aesthetic and pedagogy in these three women writers as a result of their studies at Padua. Through this

[11] Don Shewey, "Her Championship Season: Cutting-Edge Playwright Maria Irene Fornes gets Mainstream Respect as New York's Signature Theatre Company Presents a Season of her Works," *The Advocate* 798 (9 November 1999): 74.

demonstration, I intend to underscore the Fornesian[12] and Paduan pedagogical foundation which is that the art of teaching playwriting is found in focusing on the development of the ***playwright*** rather than the play,[13] that "the playwright ***is*** the play,"[14] and that through stressing process over product, a practice that takes longer but in the end reaps more meaningful reward, our culture benefits by producing dramatists who think critically and creatively, who are equipped to produce thought-provoking,

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[12] Though I discovered the original coinage of this word after I began using it in this dissertation, I do feel it necessary to attribute its premier print usage to Alberto Sandoval and Nancy Saporta Sternbach who contributed the essay, "Maria Irene Fornes as Mentor" to the Delgado/Svich tribute, ***Conducting a Life: Reflections on the Theatre of Maria Irene Fornes*** (Lyme, New Hampshire: Smith and Kraus, Inc., 1999), 195. However, Steven Drukman in "Notes on Fornes (With Apologies to Susan Sontag)," ***American Theatre*** 17 (September 2000), 36-39, 85, with reference to this and Robinson's book coming out at essentially the same time, also used the term and attempted to define it. Though he never successfully pinned down a meaning, his attempts running the gamut from it's "like amnesia--for critics," 38; is "at once, giddy ***and*** jaded" (emphasis in original), 38; "***And*** it's political" (italics in original), 38; is "'about' freedom of expression," 38; is "'Chekhovian,'" 39; is realism but stripped of realism's conventions, 39; and "Fornesia and knowingness are antitheses," 85, it is important to note that his usage in no way approximates mine or Sandoval's and Sternbach's. Using post-modern entitlement, I simply adjectified the noun, as the surname, Fornes, is so easily modified thus, and refers only to those qualities embodied by her work and her legend that I enumerate within this dissertation. I presume that is all Sandoval and Sternbach meant as well.

[13] John Steppling, "When There is Nothing to Sell," forward in ***Padua: Plays From the Padua Hills Playwrights Festival***, ed. Guy Zimmerman (New York: Padua Playwrights Press, 2003), 4.

[14] Robert Hedley, "Interview," in ***Scriptwork: A Director's Approach to New Play Development***, ed. David Kahn and Donna Breed, (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press), 138.

serious theatre thus ensuring that the art form will not perish.

Justification and Literature Review

The overall intent of this dissertation is to illuminate these three virtual frontiers of scholarly research: the pedagogy of Maria Irene Fornes, and that of Murray Mednick and the Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival; Padua as an entity unto itself; and three West Coast women playwrights whose work hitherto has not been studied. Secondarily, the intent is to provide a lens with which to view the current condition of playwriting pedagogy and new play development, thereby stimulating further research aimed towards discovering solutions for more effective development of playwrights *and* their plays.

1. Maria Irene Fornes's Pedagogical Influence.

Maria Irene Fornes, in the last few years, has succumbed to Alzheimer's disease. Thus, I was unable to interview her. To compose this study, I relied on memory, field notes from classes I took with her, and oral interviews with others who knew and studied with her. I also perused available scholarly and trade sources as enumerated below.

Prior to the onset of this illness, Fornes intended to write about her creative writing methods and in fact began a pedagogical book sometime around 1986, called ***The Anatomy of Inspiration***. However, this book was never written.[15] The issue of her pedagogy is now considered a "thorny subject"[16] with much disagreement over the rights to her work, in particular, this body of unwritten knowledge.

While I have no desire to challenge legalities or rile the status quo, my concern is that the pedagogical aspect of this very important twentieth century woman theatre artist will vanish in the good faith efforts to protect her rights. One need only browse Linda Ben-Zvi's biography of Susan Glaspell, 1931 Pulitzer Prize winner in drama, to discover how familiar is this feminine fate, and how long it takes to redress--decades if not centuries--sometimes never. Ben-Zvi describes her "shock and anger"[17] when, while researching Eugene O'Neill (whose biographers merely footnote Glaspell as the catalyst responsible for bringing

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[15] Ross Wetzsteon, "Irene Fornes: The Elements of Style," in ***The Theatre of Maria Irene Fornes***, ed. Marc Robinson (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 27, n. 1, 249. See also Kathleen Betsko and Rachel Koenig, eds., ***Interviews with Contemporary Women Playwrights*** (NY: Beach Tree Books, 1987), 154.

[16] Caridad Svich, E-Mail to Andréa Onstad, Subject: ***Maria Irene Fornes***, 7 September 2005.

[17] Linda Ben-Zvi, ***Susan Glaspell: Her Life And Times*** (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), x.

the playwright and the Provincetown Players together, thereby launching his career), she wandered over to the Glaspell stacks and discovered the "extent of her writing" and "the extent of her erasure from the American dramatic and literary canons."[18] Although Fornes never won a Pulitzer herself,[19] one of her protégées, Nilo Cruz, did. It is not impossible that Fornes could become a mere footnote to a future Cruz biography much in the same way Glaspell became a footnote to O'Neill's.

This dissertation is ***not*** a catalogue of exercises such as Augusto Boal's ***Games for Actors and Non-Actors***.[20] As much as such a book is needed to offset the current glut of mediocre, self-same generating playwriting texts, such a cataloguing would likely infringe on the legal rights of Fornes's estate and would certainly incense her protectors. I have no interest in such provocation or in finding myself at the center of such turmoil, regardless of the fact that such a book would be welcomed in academia and useful to teachers of playwriting. Instead, I speak to the exercises

[18] Ibid.

[19] Fornes's ***And What of the Night***, later titled ***What of the Night***, was a Pulitzer finalist in 1988.

[20] Augusto Boal, ***Games for Actors and Non-Actors***, 2d ed., trans. Adrian Jackson (London: Routledge, 2002).

of both Fornes and Mednick that I experienced personally and have since used in my own classrooms, always, of course, crediting their creators; I will also include those pertaining to the development of specific plays by Ki Gottberg and Cheryl Slean. The rest of the exercise oeuvre will remain, for now, as oral tradition, which may be pedagogically preferable.[21]

Playwriting Pedagogy Literature Review.

Because this dissertation is at its core a playwriting pedagogical study, I feel it necessary to include a review of pertinent and available playwriting texts prior to reviewing direct subject literature. Scores of playwriting texts abound. Several years ago I began compiling an ongoing, partially annotated bibliography (forty-one entries and counting) and was shocked and disappointed to find only three woman authors (five, if counting one

[21] The September 2009 issue of ***Performing Arts Journal*** contains a section on the Fornes legacy which includes exercises recorded by several writers who attended her workshops between the years 1983 and 1992 at Padua, INTAR, Iowa, Taxco, and Mark Taper Forum. In a blanket E-Mail dated 1 June 2008, Caridad Svich invited colleagues to send her exercises remembered from Fornes's workshops which she assembled and submitted to ***PAJ*** editor Bonnie Marranca for inclusion in a special tribute section of the journal to Fornes as teacher. Svich was careful to state that this project met with Fornes's approval. Caridad Svich, "The Legacy of Maria Irene Fornes: A Collection of Impressions and Exercises," ***PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*** 31, no. 3 (September 2009): 1-32.

unpublished dissertation and a film writers' guide).[22] Most, if not all, promise the reader success in crafting conflict, crisis, catharsis, and believable characters through a dozen or so easy-to-understand lessons based on interpretation of Aristotle's ***Poetics***. Most of them read as commissioned texts, varying only with the personality of the writer and arrangement of the material.

Some, such as William Missouri Downs' and Robin U. Russin's ***Naked Playwriting: The Art, the Craft, and the Life Laid Bare,***[23] provide excellent discussion for marketing plays. It references the savvy, must-have book for playwrights, ***Stage Writers Handbook,*** written by Dana Singer,[24] lawyer and former executive director of The

[22] Julie Jensen, one of the three women authors, wrote an intentionally short and to-the-point text (fifty-two pages), ***Playwriting, Quick & Dirty***, TMs (photocopy) (Karen Wakefield, Agent, Epstein-Wyckoff & Associates, Beverly Hills, CA, 1994), but for fifteen years could not find a publisher because it was too short. She finally found a publisher after she switched agents. The publisher, however, opposed to the word "dirty," insisted on a change in title and also requested a chapter on development, a list of plays at the end, and a checklist at the end of every chapter. Julie complied with all of these requests and ***Playwriting, Brief and Brilliant***, still a slim volume containing only eighty-nine pages, was published in 2007 by Smith and Kraus. Julie Jensen, E-Mails to Andréa J. Onstad, Subject: ***Julie Jensen's Book***, 8, 9, 13, and 14 May 2008.

[23] William Missouri Downs and Robin U. Russin, ***Naked Playwriting: The Art, the Craft, and the Life Laid Bare*** (Los Angeles: Silman-James Press) 2004).

[24] Dana Singer, ***Stage Writers Handbook*** (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 1997).

Dramatists Guild, which details legal, copyright and business aspects often neglected in creative enterprises.

In concert with these practical texts, Buzz McLaughlin's ***The Playwright's Process: Learning the Craft from Today's Leading Dramatists***[25] offers excellent formatting examples with advice from select, established playwrights of similar aesthetic (John Guare, Arthur Miller, Marsha Norman, Lanford Wilson, and others) which fit neatly into the well-made play criteria most books espouse.

Gary Garrison's ***Perfect 10: Writing and Producing the 10-Minute Play***[26] is filled with witticisms but is virtually all personality. With the exception of one page containing succinct information for writing the currently-in-vogue ten-minute play[27] (which information could be transferred to well-made one-acts and full-lengths), the text is so self-absorbed, one is left knowing more about the author than about playwriting.

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[25] Buzz McLaughlin, ***The Playwright's Process: Learning the Craft*** from ***Today's Leading Dramatists*** McLaughlin (New York: Back Stage Books, 1997).

[26] Gary Garrison, ***Perfect 10: Writing and Producing the 10-Minute Play*** (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001).

[27] Ibid., 16. This page tells the reader exactly what needs to appear where. As a formulaic, it is precise, uncompromising, useful.

Paul Castagno's text, ***New Playwriting Strategies: A Language-Based Approach to Playwriting,***[28] is currently the only scholarly attempt to go beyond Aristotelian method and theorize a new approach to playwriting by discussing a certain small genre of plays that have gained recognition despite the demand for the well-made format. Based on the work of the new "language" playwrights, among them Mac Wellman, Eric Overmyer, Len Jenkin, Neena Beber, Matthew Maguire, Ruth Magraff, and Jeffrey Jones, and their language-driven techniques, Castagno introduces an entirely new vocabulary with which to talk about these new plays. With words like "chops" ("the confidence and facility of technique"), "dialogism" ("staging of different voices") and "framing" ("a metadramatic technique utilized to change a spatial or temporal setting"),[29] we are given language to discuss the new and unorthodox ways these plays work, language that is highly reminiscent of ethnographic socio-cultural vocabulary. He states:

> Herein I demonstrate in significant detail a challenge to the prevailing orthodoxy in playwriting. In fact, I heartily feel that we

[28] Paul C. Castagno, ***New Playwriting Strategies: A Language-Based Approach to Playwriting*** (New York: Routledge, 2001).

[29] Ibid., 8-9.

have only tapped the surface as to what great playwriting can be.[30]

Although Castagno thoroughly discusses the language-based play, more theory is needed to explore visual, aleatory, and other work that does not fall under the dualistic labels of either well-made play or performance art[31] which until Castagno published his text appeared to be the only defining categories for playmaking. Even David Copelin, hired to teach criticism at the first Padua workshop/festival, does not stray from the standard well-made playwriting format in his book, ***Practical Playwriting,***[32] nor does he mention Padua or Padua playwriting pedagogical techniques.

With the exception of Sam Smiley's inspirational tome, ***Playwriting: The Structure of Action,***[33] few texts purport to teach the ***art*** of playwriting itself, as process existing

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[30] Ibid., xi.

[31] Work such as that of Maria Irene Fornes and Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival alumni.

[32] David Copelin, ***Practical Playwriting: Techniques, Shortcuts, and Exercises to Help You Write Successful Stage Plays*** (Boston: The Writer, Inc., 1998).

[33] Sam Smiley, ***Playwriting: The Structure of Action*** (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971; revised and expanded with Norman A. Bert, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), (page citations are to the original edition). This second edition was highly modified. Smiley's original language was over-simplified, thus losing its inspirational message and causing the book to read more like its cookie-cutter cohorts.

apart from its end-product--production, and none provide a motivational basis or display the expository skill to do so. The first edition of Smiley's book provides this motivation, particularly in the first chapter's[34] discussions of life, art, and creativity, which concludes:

> An artist is subordinate to his vision. It consists of his intuition, his bridge of labor, and the works of art themselves. Only by means of a vision--partly conscious, partly intuitive, and fully creative--can the artist pursue his virtue and fulfill his potential. A writer must have something to say. But in order to have something to say, he must see, feel, and think.
>
> As modern artists view human existence, their collective vision of Man vs. Nothingness has its effect on individuals in their midst. Modern man appears to be cursed with inner poverty. Artists exhibit this in paintings, plays, and novels. But, ironically, as an artist formulates such living statements, he disproves the inner poverty of man. An artist creates from inner plenty, even if that plenty is concerned with the grotesque. An artist's will to create reflects his life force. To the artist, the startling thing about man is not that he is a rational animal nor that he may, or may not, have a soul. The marvelous in man is his creativity.[35]

Craft books for prose are often more inspirationally and motivationally successful than playwriting texts.

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[34] Ibid., 3-19.

[35] Ibid., 19.

Natalie Goldberg's ***Writing Down the Bones***[36] and Anne Lamott's ***Bird by Bird***[37] come to mind, perhaps because they are not locked into a one-way-only mode and recognize the worth of individual voice.

Eric Bentley, in ***The Playwright As Thinker,***[38] predating Smiley by twenty-five years, forewarns that a theatre devoid of art, based solely on box office returns, is a dead theatre:

> [Drama] can be taken seriously. [P]laywrights must have a self to express. Our commercial playwrights have none. They are as nearly as possible nobody. The imaginative playwright is somebody.[39]

This loss of individual voice due to commercialization continues to be a concern. In 1988, over forty years after Bentley's comment, Douglas Anderson, in an attempt to prove that there was money and opportunity for playwrights, visited numerous new play development venues across the United States. He discovered, however, that the opportunities came with a cost to the product:

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[36] Natalie Goldberg, ***Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within*** (Boston: Shambhala, 1986).

[37] Anne Lamott, ***Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*** (New York: Doubleday, 1994).

[38] Eric Bentley, ***The Playwright As Thinker: A Study of Drama in Modern Times*** (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1946).

[39] Ibid., 18-19.

> In artificial environments we tinker with the chemistry of creation. These hothouses create a lot of product, but we shouldn't be surprised by the uniformity of size and color and taste.[40]

Further, almost fifty years after Bentley's comments, Robert Hedley, nine years director of the Iowa Playwrights Workshop, warned against this same process:

> In development what you're trying to do is encourage what is unique about a writer. . . . Some people . . . often don't understand that the playwright is the play, that the vision of the play is not its "idea" or something else that can be deconstructed or otherwise reconstituted. . . . My objection to much "development" is that it resembles real estate development. Something raw is made efficient. Efficiency usually means conforming to established play forms or chopping off what is perplexing or ambiguous. The shaping that goes on is an attempt, in the worst instances, to make something unruly behave.[41]

This commodification of individual voice is having a box-store effect--lots of product but no quality.

Except for certain revered historical (i.e., dead) playwrights, dramatic writing is usually considered nonliterary, a mere blueprint, not art. The latest cant is that plays can only become art when they are fully realized on the stage through live actors interpreting and

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[40] Douglas Anderson, "The Dream Machine: Thirty Years of New Play Development in America," *TDR* 32, no. 3 (Autumn 1988): 71.

[41] Hedley Interview, 137-138.

performing the script with errors and flaws corrected by zealous directors and dramaturgs. Logically, then, this thinking makes directors and dramaturgs the only artists in theatre. If the playwright isn't an artist, then what is s/he? This disregard for the writing of plays is taking its toll. Outside of a handful of well-known programs dedicated specifically to playwriting and new play production, more and more academic departments offer screenwriting, a distinctly different medium, in its stead as the performative writing course option.

The playwriting texts referred to above attest to this commodification. As with any how-to book perused, one quickly discovers the write-by-numbers approach is frightfully constipative. Even with the injection of authorial personality throughout the texts, one finds that without that live pedagogical presence, the text becomes mere reference. The teacher ***is*** the teaching, imparting embodied, long accrued knowledge through oral tradition as was exemplified at the Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival with all teachers but particularly the "spiritual Mom and Dad of the place,"[42] Fornes and Mednick.

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[42] Leon Martell, "Working with Maria Irene Fornes," in C***onducting a Life: Reflections on the Theatre of Maria Irene Fornes***, ed. Maria M. Delgado and Caridad Svich (Lyme, New Hampshire: Smith and Kraus, Inc., 1999), 35.

Maria Irene Fornes Literature Review.

Numerous articles, interviews, dissertations, scholarly texts, a website,[43] and a videobiography-in-progress[44] exist concerning Fornes and her work. There is also a class titled "Major Playwrights: Maria Irene Fornes," designed and taught by Dr. Gwendolyn Alker at New York University during the Fall 2006 and Winter 2008 semesters--the only known class to feature Fornes as sole subject. Most of the information is embedded in collections of contemporary theatre artists in which mention of Fornes is included in prefaces, snippets or other commentary. Some sources examine *how* she writes, many examine *what* she writes *about*, several interviews ask about her writing pedagogy with brief response, but there are no scholarly works devoted exclusively to the examination of her writing pedagogy, and none exploring the influence of her pedagogy on playwrights other than those who attended INTAR.

The 1999-2000 Signature Theatre season in New York was devoted entirely to Fornes's work. Possibly in concert

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[43] http://www.mariairenefornes.com, managed by Maggie Mackay, a not-for-profit, unofficial website.

[44] Michelle Memran, producer, director, *The Rest I Make Up: Documenting Irene,* videobiography, in progress.

with this tribute and to herald its importance to Fornes devotees, a collection of seven previously unpublished essays along with published criticism of her work, reviews, and interviews titled *The Theatre of Maria Irene Fornes,* edited by Marc Robinson, was published in 1999.[45] The collection highlights the fact that Fornes, nine times Obie winner, had gone critically underappreciated for thirty-five years (if one compares her general public visibility to that of her contemporaries such as Sam Shepard and Lanford Wilson, for instance). The book is a testament to the importance of her work in theatre and a useful compilation of earlier texts found only by archival search.

One of these texts is an excerpt from Scott Cummings' interview with Fornes first published in *Theatre* magazine in 1985.[46] In this interview, Cummings questions Fornes about the development of her writing and pedagogical technique through study at the Actors Studio Playwrights Unit. Fornes explains that the combination of memory and visualization exercises helped her learn to listen to her characters and thus enabled her to create living entities,

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[45] Marc Robinson, ed., *The Theatre of Maria Irene Fornes* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

[46] Scott Cummings, "Seeing with Clarity: The Visions of Maria Irene Fornes," *Theatre* 17, no. 1 (Winter 1985).

the crux of her pedagogy. She passed this technique on to her students:

> What I teach in my workshop is simply to learn how to listen to the characters, not only how to listen to the characters you have planted there but even how to have a character appear in front of you. You don't know where that person came from or what that person is doing there, but you follow that vision and follow it through.[47]

Another book, compiled and edited by Maria Delgado and Caridad Svich, ***Conducting a Life: Reflections on the Theatre of Maria Irene Fornes,***[48] and published in the same year as Robinson's casebook, likely for the same heralding reason, reads more like a eulogy. The fact of her subsequent illness, which at the time of publication in 1999 may have been a mere a blip on the horizon and suspected by only a privy few, serves to heighten this sense of bittersweet tribute. It is a collection of testimonials with introductions by both Svich and Delgado that, while providing astute insight into Fornes's work and even an excellent performative/autoethnograpical/creative nonfictional account by a student in one of Fornes's classes, leaves one with a wistful longing. The knowledge

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[47] Ibid., 55.

[48] Maria M. Delgado and Caridad Svich, eds., ***Conducting a Life:*** Reflections ***on the Theatre of Maria Irene Fornes*** (Lyme, NH: Smith and Kraus, Inc., 1999).

that one can no longer get her "Irene fix," as I used to call it when my creative juices went dry and I felt the need for rejuvenation, comes as a painful reality.

In David Savran's interview with Fornes published in his collection, ***In Their Own Words: Contemporary American Playwrights,***[49] Fornes describes her teaching at the INTAR lab:

> For six years now I've been teaching playwriting at INTAR. I have an ideal situation there. This year we are meeting every morning at 9:30 for thirteen weeks, which is very intensive. Usually we meet three times a week for six months. First thing, we do half an hour of yoga. Then I give them a writing exercise. I have invented exercises that are very effective and very profound. They take you to the place where creativity is, where personal experience and personal knowledge are used. But it's not ***about*** your personal experience. Personal experience feeds that creative place. ***It's wonderful to see that people can learn how to write.*** [Emphasis added.][50]

Eleven years prior to Savran's interview, Fornes described her writing process to Robb Creese in an interview published in the December 1977 issue of ***The Drama Review.***[51]

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[49] David Savran, "Maria Irene Fornes," in ***In Their Own Words: Contemporary American Playwrights*** (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 1988), 51-69.

[50] Ibid., 58.

[51] Maria Irene Fornes, "I Write These Messages That Come," interview by Robb Creese in ***The Drama Review*** 21, no. 4 (December 1977): 25-40.

Fornes was already exhibiting a unique approach to writing. She described the process she went through to get herself into the mood to write and how she devised exercises for herself, one of which resulted in her (1965) play, *Promenade*.

An often-repeated story memorialized by Ross Wetzsteon[52] and quoted fully in Chapter Two of this study describes how Fornes came to writing. Briefly, she and her roommate, Susan Sontag, who wanted to write but had not yet begun, sat down at their kitchen table. Fornes, determined to show Sontag how easy it was, took down a cookbook, opened it at random and began composing a short story using the first word of every sentence. This playful, communal approach to writing heralded future methods and lifelong preferences.

Fornes discussed what she believed to be the false premise that writers have to work alone in a 1987 interview with Kathleen Betsko and Rachel Koenig.[53] That very idea, she said, prohibited many would-be writers from even making the attempt. The (INTAR) lab, she believed, provided a group work ethic with no distraction. In Ouija Board

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[52] Wetzsteon, 25-38.

[53] Kathleen Betsko and Rachel Koenig, eds., ***Interviews with Contemporary Women Playwrights*** (NY: Beach Tree Books, 1987), 154.

manner, the tables at which they worked had to touch in order to maintain this type of connection. A "kind of mental communication" [54] developed resulting in an emerging group mind.

A decade later, Fornes responded to Una Chaudhuri's direct question, Can writing be taught?,[55] in typical Fornesian fashion. She eluded a clear yes or no answer and focused instead on the root of the question--the process of teaching--rather than its product:

> Chaudhuri: What is the role of teaching in your life? How does teaching relate to your writing?
>
> Fornes: I like to share my own discoveries about writing, because that's what teaching is, to show the students some possibilities. Or even to give them the desire to find their own way to go about writing.
>
> Chaudhuri: Are you saying that one can't really teach writing, that one can just help start the process in other writers and just get them connected to their own process?
>
> Fornes: Getting them connected to their own process is teaching writing.[56]

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[54] Ibid., 156-157.

[55] Una Chaudhuri, "Maria Irene Fornes," in ***Speaking On Stage: Interview with Contemporary American Playwrights***, eds. Philip C. Kolin and Colby H. Kullman (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1996), 98-114.

[56] Ibid., 104.

There are many such tidbits of information to be found in articles, reviews, interviews, collections, books about Fornes and/or other contemporary playwrights. Bonnie Marranca[57] and Susan Sontag[58] both paid tribute to and endorsed her work. Feminist critical writings on Fornes's work abound, with Deborah Geis's preoccupation in "Wordscapes of the Body: Performative Language as ***Gestus*** in Maria Irene Fornes's Plays,"[59] a highlight of this perspective. Geis concluded that Fornes's characters' language originates from their bodies and thus are embodied solidly in character flesh extending outward to the mise-en-scène of the play. Fornes's students attest to this phenomenon from experiencing her "creating life" workshop exercises.

A critical article concerning Fornes's writing, "Six Small Thoughts on Fornes, the Problem of Intention, and Willfulness,"[60] appeared in ***Theatre Topics*** in 2001. Written

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[57] Bonnie Marranca, "The Real Life of Maria Irene Fornes," in ***Theatrewritings***, Gautam Dsagupta, ed. (New York: Performing Arts Journals Publications, 1984), 69-73.

[58] Susan Sontag, "Preface," in ***Maria Irene Fornes Plays: Mud, The Danube, The Conduct of Life, Sarita*** (New York: PAJ Publications, 1985), 7-10.

[59] Deborah R. Geis, "Wordscapes of the Body: Performative Language as Gestus In Maria Irene Fornes's Plays," ***Theatre Journal*** 42, no. 3 (October 1990): 291-307.

by MacArthur Fellow and playwright Sarah Ruhl, it is the first study of Fornes's ideology by one of her students and the first article to begin examining the difference between Aristotelian writing method, writing with intention, and Fornesian method, writing moment-to-moment sans character "want," a style reminiscent of the works of Maurice Maeterlinck.[61] Ruhl attended the same Fornes workshop in Taxco, Mexico that I did. Unbeknownst to one another, both of us wrote down, nearly word-for-word, the very same quotes. Ruhl took Fornes's craft talk a bit further, however, than the usual complaint about the Aristotelian lock on drama by comparing it to Karl Marx's critique on capitalism; the constant theatrical drone, "What does the character want?,"[62] is, she posits, the same question for a

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[60] Sarah Ruhl, "Six Small Thoughts on Fornes, the Problem of Intention, and Willfulness," ***Theatre Topics*** 11, no. 2 (2001): 187-204.

[61] "In the 1890s Maeterlinck argued that the most dramatic moments are those silent ones during which the mystery of existence, ordinarily obscured by bustling activity, makes itself felt." Oscar G. Brockett with Franklin J. Hildy, ***History of the Theatre***, 8th ed. (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1999), 439. Maurice Maeterlinck, "The Tragical in Daily Life," trans. Alfred Sutro, in ***Dramatic Theory and Criticism: Greeks to Grotowski***, ed. Bernard F. Dukore (New York: Holt, Rinehard and Winston, Inc., 1974), 726-731.

[62] Ruhl quotes Fornes as saying, "American actors are taught to have objectives—what does your character want from the other characters, etc." Ruhl, 187. Constantin Stanislavski in ***An Actor Prepares***, discusses this need for an actor to have objectives (Constantin Stanislavski, ***An Actor Prepares***, trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1984), 116-119), building on according to Ruhl, the Aristotelian delineations of desire. Ruhl, 189.

Marxist. "The theatrics of intention as outlined by the ultimate capitalist and the ultimate materialist . . . both suggest money or power as the motive force in human interactions."[63] Ruhl asks, "Why does a contemporary American audience want to see people want things and get things onstage?"[64] Fornes, she says, states that American theatre-goers are middle-class people who "want to see their values confirmed."[65] And those values are capitalistically motivated. Ruhl quotes Fornes, "Life is not constantly about wanting to get something from somebody else. Life is about pleasure."[66] My memory of that particular workshop is based on that quote which I, too, wrote down. It was at that moment that I realized how deep was Fornes's teaching--she taught an outlook on life, not simply an activity in life.

While a Marxist critique of Fornes's writings is beyond the scope of this dissertation, this article was a pivotal moment in my research for its "six small thoughts," tiny as they were, playfully mirrored Aristotle's often-

[63] Ruhl, 188.

[64] Ibid., 195.

[65] Ibid., 187.

[66] Ibid., 187, 189.

referenced "six small points,"[67] and suggest why Fornes's work was never recognized by mainstream theatre--it wasn't capitalistic enough; and why her workshops created such a loyal following--they offered the opportunity to explore characters who didn't always have to have an identifiable objective, characters who could just "be." I believe this article, will, in time, provoke further thought on this deified concept of drama and factor in a whole new vision for playwriting pedagogy.

Numerous dissertations include Fornes as subject but only four thus far concern Fornes as sole subject. Of these dissertations, two have been published as books. Of the other two, one is an examination of six Fornes plays though the lens of feminist theories and epistemologies.[68] The other is a 1999 dissertation written by Mala Renganathan of Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, India, the first international dissertation, titled simply, "Maria Irene Fornes' Theater: A Study."[69] The unofficial Maria Irene Fornes website has published Renganathan's chapter

[67] Plot, character, thought, diction, song, spectacle, preferenced in that order.

[68] Judy Baker, "Theatre is Life: Fornes, Feminisms and Feminist Epistemology" (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York, Albany, 2002).

[69] Mala Renganathan, "Maria Irene Fornes' Theatre: A Study" (Ph.D. diss., Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, India, 1999).

summaries.[70] The most intriguing chapter, the second, begs the question of post-absurdist characteristics in Fornes's plays.[71] None of the chapters, however, as in the other dissertations, explore Fornes's pedagogy.

Because of its international scope, Renganathan's dissertation has the potential to be a pivotal scholarly work, throwing Fornes into global spotlight. At this time, however, the two dissertations that were published as books, both in 1996, are the main source of serious, sustained scholarly study on Maria Irene Fornes. While neither discusses Fornesian pedagogy per se, both address her language, process, and briefly touch on workshop technique but only as it applied to Fornes's own writing. Much information in both books is gleaned from the various previously published interviews mentioned above. Diane Lynn Moroff's ***Fornes: Theater in the Present Tense***,[72] offers

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[70] Mala Renganathan, "Maria Irene Fornes' Theatre: A Study," http://www.mariairenefornes.com/Academia/theatre-astudy.html, Internet, accessed 26 July 2007.

[71] "[Fornes'] post absurd plays characterize the absurd and also subvert the absurd. For example, Beckettian humor is considered a graveyard humor, whereas Fornes' post absurd humor is full of tomfoolery, unstoppable puns and hilarious jokes. Besides, the metaphysical anguish in the absurd is replaced with metaphysical optimism. Particularly interesting is the fact that Fornes' post absurd theatre is the woman's experience of/experiment with the absurd, and that she places woman at the center of the theater of the absurd." Ibid.

[72] Diane Lynn Moroff, ***Fornes: Theater in the Present Tense*** (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996).

close readings of four of her plays, emphasizing sensuality over intellectuality, visual imagery over text, both which Moroff believes are traits ignored by previous critics. In reference to Fornes's visualization techniques Moroff notes: "She is building rather than writing a text . . . to build rather than to write a play necessitates a more multifaceted engagement for the playwright."[73] Moroff also comments on the often-noted desire that Fornes not be pigeonholed--whether politically, sexually, artistically, she "partially means to elude her critics and their categories."[74] This resistance to categorization confounded her critics and forces even closer reading of her texts and performances.

Assunta Martolomucci Kent's ***Maria Irene Fornes and Her Critics***[75] is an ambitious study, underpinned by feminist theory, providing an inclusive summary of the beginnings of feminist scholarship, Fornes's clash with feminists' attempts to theorize her work, and Fornes's resistance to identity politics, pointing out, as does Moroff, that Fornes's work resists easy categorization. The book is

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[73] Ibid., 8.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Assunta Martolomucci Kent, ***Maria Irene Fornes and Her Critics*** (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996).

essentially a valuable survey of previous critics' evaluations in context with feminist theatre history. Kent's chronicling of Fornes's career through a feminist lens offers a historical perspective and biographical approach to Fornes and her work. The book contains a plethora of information, both critical and historical, including a brief history of the origin of the INTAR workshop with reference to those Latina/o playwrights who benefited from the lab and her enthusiasm in regards to producing their new work. Mention of Padua sheds further light on Fornes's own development process. Padua's requirements for each invited playwright to produce short, forty-minute pieces for outside performance became works-in-progress that she took back to New York to develop into full-length plays when the summer workshop ended for the season, with the added challenge of revamping the site specific outdoor settings for indoor presentation. As a historical, critical study, the book is excellent and inspirational. Kent states in her introduction: "I hope that this first study encourages others to study, teach, and produce Fornes' work."[76]

[76] Ibid., 6.

2. The Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival.

Very little writing exists regarding the Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival. With the exception of two performance reviews[77] and one article published in 1979 in ***Performing Arts Journal***[78] just after the first workshop concluded, there has been no critical study, no in-depth scholarly review, little to no acknowledgement of its existence except for those invited artists, such as Fornes, who used the venue to explore new work and discussed the benefits of Padua's experimentation in interviews and articles. With only these brief, sporadic references, Padua could indeed vanish as did many female playwrights in times past. Though this study is not a historical study ***about*** Padua per se, an overview of the workshop/festival is necessary background to more fully understand its influence on both Fornes and her students.

Padua had its own unique aesthetic that is still identifiable in plays created by its attendees today. By

[77] Susan Mosakowski, "Staking it Out," ***Performing Arts Journal*** 17, no. 1 (1995): 44-48 (a review of Mosakowksi's "The Tight Fit," at E.T.C., La Mama New York, premiering at Padua); David J. DeRose, "The Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop/Festival VII, Valencia, CA 2-29 June 1984," ***Theatre Journal*** 37, no. 1 (1985): 110-111 (a performance review of that year's festival).

[78] Jules Aaron, "Padua Hills Playwriting Workshop," ***Performing Arts Journal*** 3, no. 3 (1979): 121-126.

referencing Padua in this dissertation it is my hope that future scholars will be inspired to tackle a fuller historical project before too much time passes, original sources lost, and major players, many currently willing and able to be interviewed, gone.

I attended Padua in 1991 and then was offered a student coordinator position in 1994 but was unable to attend. In addition, I had access to information about Padua through one of its often-invited artists, John O'Keefe, my sister's partner from the late 1970s through the early 1990s. Over the years, O'Keefe and I have had many discussions about playwriting in general and Padua in particular. I was thus exposed to Padua philosophy and saw its productions presented at the Bay Area Playwrights Festival long before actually attending as a totally immersed student.

For several years in the mid-1980s, the same artists who were invited to Padua were invited to the Bay Area Playwrights Festival, O'Keefe among them. Padua occurred earlier in the summer, lasting up to seven weeks. The artist developed his or her play there, presented it, and then traveled north to the much shorter Bay Area Festival for a second presentation, providing a double opportunity

to workshop the developing work. I cut my baby dramatic teeth on Padua experimental work which ever after influenced my view and aesthetic of theatre.

To construct Padua history, I relied somewhat on memory and field notes but also interviewed co-founder and artistic director of the original Padua, Murray Mednick, as well as artistic director of its current incarnation, Guy Zimmerman. Both were extremely helpful in providing historical facts and information. However, through the course of the interview process, I discovered the Padua papers had not been archived. Through my encouragement, Murray Mednick contacted the University of California Los Angeles and they have agreed to accept the papers.

I also interviewed Cheryl Slean, managing director of Padua from 1990 to 1993, Ki Gottberg, 1990-1991 alum, and further communed with John O'Keefe. I found that more aspiring playwrights than aspiring academics attended Padua which likely contributed to the lack of scholarly commentary. "Playwrights," as Mednick says in a brief article on Padua's closing, "aren't necessarily the world's best organizers."[79] I also cobbled together what I could of

[79] Farkash, 3.

the literature that does exist to create a better picture of what Padua was.

The Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival Literature Review.

As previously mentioned, with the exception of two reviews, the only existing scholarly article appeared in 1979 in ***Performing Arts Journal*** and concerned the inaugural Padua Workshop and Festival.[80] Because this article is the only report on this first event, it is an important document. The article includes a short description of each of the pieces developed by the invited playwrights, including Fornes's ***In Service*** and her response to the challenge of adjusting to working in an outside environment plagued by smog alerts. Fornes's response may be her first reference to this unique development situation. Curiously, no reference is made to Richard Schechner's work along similar lines, though Schechner's disparaging of the writer in favor of the director may have underpinned overlook.[81] The article concludes with a discussion between Mednick and Fornes of the process of playwriting and success of this first workshop/festival.

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[80] Aaron.

[81] See footnote 163, pages 90.

Other useful information can be found as introductions to the several available Padua Hills Press compilations of plays. Playwright John Steppling prefaces the 2003 compilation with a beautifully written, sensuous ode to Padua in his "When There is Nothing to Sell,"[82] which in its few short pages manages to capture the mood, the aesthetic, the politics, the ideology and even the physicality of Padua. In that same volume, Wesley Walker offers a very brief history of Padua along with his own account of being a student before launching into a description of the plays contained in the volume.[83] Walker's final paragraph makes a concerted attempt to describe what Padua was:

> The Padua Hills Playwrights Festival was ***theater***, theater in its oldest sense. It shared more with the Greeks and the Elizabethans than it did with any of the current television-inspired situation comedies or musicals based on Disney cartoons or "edgy" well-made satires, or 1940's-style social statement dramas or glittering campfests. These are jagged, wildly human plays. They reach deep for what is noble and terrible in human life and bring to the surface an evanescent, ever-mysterious bounty (emphasis in original).[84]

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[82] Steppling, 3-6.

[83] Wesley Walker, "Padua: Wild in the Hills," in ***Padua: Plays From the Padua Hills Playwrights Festival***, ed. Guy Zimmerman (New York: Padua Playwrights Press, 2003), 9-15.

[84] Ibid., 14-15.

Within that same volume, there is, at the back, a very brief, anonymous statement titled simply, "About Padua,"[85] which highlights the transition from the original workshop/festival organization to the current production company.

Best of the West: An Anthology of Plays from the 1989 and 1990 Padua Hills Playwrights Festivals[86] contains a one-page introduction by co-editor Bill Raden primarily reiterating previous information. *Plays From Padua Hills 1982*[87] contains a Statement of Purpose for the Festival written by Murray Mednick,[88] a very short Padua bio written by Susan LaTempa[89] that includes reference to the theatre company that first occupied the original site, and a charming creative introduction by Murray Mednick, "Introduction: A Coyote Tale,"[90] underscoring the seven-year, seven coyote play cycle Mednick wrote and produced

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[85] Ibid., 501-502.

[86] Murray Mednick, Bill Raden, and Cheryl Slean, eds., *Best of the West: An Anthology of Plays From the 1989 and 1990 Padua Hills Playwrights Festival*, with a forward by Bill Raden (Los Angeles: Padua Hills Press, 1991.

[87] Murray Mednick, ed., *Plays from Padua Hills 1982* (Claremont, CA: The Pomona College Theatre Department, 1983).

[88] Ibid., 165.

[89] Ibid., 166-167.

[90] Ibid., ii-iii.

during Padua's existence, which metaphorically describes Padua's principal purpose.

In addition to these sources, there are two news articles, one in ***American Theatre***[91] and one in ***Back Stage***[92] reporting Padua's closure and one article in ***American Theatre***[93] announcing its reorganization. It is likely that a few more tidbits exist here and there as Mednick became a New Dramatist member shortly after Padua's closing and is no stranger to the New York stage, but there is nothing substantial or scholarly written about the Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival. It is an unexplored frontier. While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to explore the ***new*** organization that emerged from the old, it is interesting as well as comforting to know that the essence of Padua does live on.

3. Contemporary West Coast Women Playwrights Justification and Literature Review.

I deliberately select contemporary ***West Coast*** women playwrights because my research has revealed very little

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[91] Briefly Noted, "The Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop/Festival has Closed its Doors" in ***American Theatre*** 13, no. 2 (February 1996):53. International Bibliography of Theatre & Dance with Full Text database accessed 20 July 2007.

[92] Farkash, 1.

[93] Luis Reyes, "Padua Comes Inside to Play," ***American Theatre*** 18, no. 4 (April 2001): 9.

scholarly study on West Coast women playwrights, a condition that calls for remedy. Many critical anthologies include only one West Coast woman playwright and more often, none. A recent examination of the book, ***Women Who Write Plays: Interviews With American Dramatists,***[94] revealed that out of the twenty-three women playwrights interviewed, only two were West Coast playwrights. One of the two was Cherríe Moraga, who, as mentioned previously, is best known for co-editing the anthology, ***This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color,***[95] a cross-discipline collection of feminist writings that has become a classic scholarly study across various disciplines. Though a number of Moraga's plays have been published and produced, this work also references her discussion of her ***inability to get work produced*** in her essay, "And Frida Looks Back: The Art of Latina/o Queer Heroics," published in ***Cast Out: Queer Lives in Theatre,*** a collection of essays edited by Robin Bernstein.[96] Even the earlier-referenced Betsko-Koenig collection contained only one interview with a West

[94] Alexis Greene, ed., ***Women Who Write Plays: Interviews With American Dramatists*** (Hanover, NH: Smith and Kraus, 2001).

[95] Moraga and Anzaldúa.

[96] Cherríe Moraga, "And Frida Looks Back: The Art of Latina/o Queer Heroics," in ***Cast Out: Queer Lives in Theatre,*** ed. Robin Bernstein (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 79-90.

Coast woman playwright (Laura Farabough). And it goes without saying that myriad volumes of collected plays do not contain reference to or plays by *any* female playwrights, let alone West Coast female playwrights. Since few anthologies of the work of or interviews with women playwrights exist, it is not surprising that there are no collections of plays written by Padua women playwrights or plays written by women playwrights who were once students at Padua. When one reviews the available literature it is almost as if the West Coast did not exist.

This amnesia towards West Coast art is not limited to women. A revealing example of the extent of this discrimination appears in Arthur H. Ballet's introduction to ***Playwrights for Tomorrow: A Collection of Plays, Volume II,*** referencing playwright John O'Keefe whose work he includes in the volume. Ballet states:

> John O'Keefe was collaborating with a special workshop group at the University of Iowa when the Magic Theatre in Berkeley decided to work with him on the play. As a result of that residency, Mr. O'Keefe apparently transferred himself to the West Coast permanently . . . and promptly disappeared.[97]

[97] Arthur H. Ballet, ed., "Introduction," ***Playwrights for Tomorrow: A Collection of Plays, Volume II*** (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1973), 6.

This blatant misstatement is a prime example of East Coast scholarly ignorance and bias on several counts. First, the Magic Theatre was and still is located in San Francisco, not Berkeley. Second, O'Keefe had and still enjoys much theatrical activity in the larger Bay Area and elsewhere. Even in 1973, at the time of publication of Ballet's book, O'Keefe was acting, teaching, writing, and had co-founded the experimental theatre group, The Blake Street Hawkeyes, known for launching the career of Whoopi Goldberg. Clearly Ballet did not research the matter or even attempt to inquire of O'Keefe's whereabouts.

Three areas of scholarly deficiency concerning women playwrights, and in particular, contemporary West Coast women playwrights, are apparent: (1) there are few collections of women playwrights generally; (2) there are no collections of West Coast women playwrights; and (3) there are no collections of West Coast women playwrights who studied at the Padua Hills Festival. This deficiency is more than adequate justification for further research or an edited, collected anthology in this area.

Methodology

A hybrid of sorts, with no singular directive prototype, this study is modeled somewhat after two historical-analytical studies: Charlotte Canning's ***Feminist Theatre in the U.S.A.: Staging Women's Experience,***[98] which utilizes oral interview as a primary tool for data collection, and Cheryl Black's ***The Women of Provincetown,***[99] which utilizes archival research. As did Canning and Black in their work, this study will highlight a little known experimental theatrical entity that existed and flourished ***after*** the first Off-Off Broadway explosion. Provincetown, as Black describes, seems to have functioned in spirit much as did Padua, by fueling experiment, challenging writers, and encompassing a do-it-yourself attitude. In addition, both existed at a time of historical ferment followed by stagnation and reversal. A study comparing the two theatrical entities would be a very worthwhile and tempting project.

This study also bears some resemblance to ethnographic and autoethnographic texts such as Dr. Elaine J. Lawless's

[98] Charlotte Canning, ***Feminist Theatre in the U.S.A.: Staging Women's Experience*** (London: Routledge, 1996).

[99] Cheryl Black, ***The Women of Provincetown: 1915-1922*** (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2002).

Women Escaping Violence: Empowerment through Narrative,[100] wherein the author immerses herself in her subject and brings personal interest to the subject as participant-observer which I have already done through my work at Padua. Drs. Lynn C. Miller, Jacqueline Taylor and M. Heather Carver's *Voices Made Flesh: Performing Women's Autobiography,*[101] a collection of women's autobiographical essays and scripts written primarily for performance but herein showcased as text, inspired my collecting memories through oral interview as well as plays. If one acknowledges that playwriting is performative as well as textual and accompanying personal commentary and explanation by their very nature, autobiographical, this study is similar.

Finally, my study borrows structurally from Carolyn Ellis's *The Ethnographic I,*[102] a creative autoethnography, concerning the *pedagogy* of autoethnography itself, examining the reflexivity in the referenced "I" in the title and comparing it to the "eye" of the researcher--that

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[100] Elaine J. Lawless, *Women Escaping Violence: Empowerment through Narrative* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2001).

[101] Lynn C. Miller, Jacqueline Taylor and M. Heather Carver, eds., *Voices Made Flesh: Performing Women's Autobiography* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2003).

[102] Carolyn Ellis, *The Ethnographic I* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004).

is, both looking and looked upon--at once both other and relational, thereby positioning the self as well as the mind into the research. There occurs a double reflexive in using Ellis as a model: this dissertation is an examination of pedagogy as it relates somewhat to my own work and directly to the work of two others as I examine that work; Ellis's book is a pedagogical examination of autoethnographical creation on the page--an autoethnography-in-the-making. Both have primarily pedagogical concerns with autobiographical content. Structurally, Ellis's work permitted me to use the academic "I."

In addition, this study complements and furthers prior research conducted by David M. White in his ethnographic dissertation, "Developing Playwright(s): New Visions and Voices for New Play Development,"[103] which is a personal, autoethnographical look at new play development as experienced by the author. It includes several versions of the author's plays as they traverse the development process with accompanying notes, reflections, and Burkean analysis of each. While I am not concentrating on the state of new

[103] David M. White, "Developing Playwright(s): New Visions and Voices for New Play Development" (Ph.D. diss., University of Missouri-Columbia: 2005).

play development per se, focusing instead on a very successful playw*right* development venue from the not-too-distant past, the astute reader can draw his or her own conclusions regarding the current state of new *play* development and conduct further research in that regard if he or she so desires.

As all subjects of my dissertation are still alive and, with the exception of one, able and willing to communicate, and because there is little information in print available regarding my particular interest, of necessity, much research had to be conducted using the ethnographical tools of interviews, field notes, observation, and analysis. Further, because I, too, am a subject, I interviewed myself, in a sense, by searching my memory and perusing old field notes. Field notes written after conducting interviews triggered memory and thus yielded even thicker, more detailed description.

Because I reconstructed my own past experience at Padua, a culture in and of itself, as well as recalling Fornes's pedagogy, I also adopted creative nonfiction[104]

[104] A term coined in the early 1970s to represent a blend of journalism and literary writing using fictional technique, first used by the National Endowment of the Arts to describe the genre on their application form to bridge the gap between traditional journalism and personal essay. The genre has since spawned a host of authors, classes, degree programs as well as the journal, ***Creative Nonfiction***,

methodology and technique such as the "Double I/Eye"[105] for those aspects of my reconstruction that access memory not included in my notes. Ethnography has just begun to draw upon such methodology; witness a burgeoning literary awareness in its textual representation.[106]

The primary method and tool, then, that I employed in conducting research for this dissertation was that of ethnography coupled with autoethnography. My work has thus been guided by both ethnographic and autoethnographic methodology and theory.

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founded in 1993 by Lee Gutkind. See "An Interview with Lee Gutkind," http://www.bookslut.com/features/2005_07_005959.php and Lee Gutkind's editorial "What's in this name--And What's Not," http://www.creativenonfiction.org/thejournal/articles/issues01/01editor.htm, both accessed 23 November 2006.

[105] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, ***Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*** (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 1: "What could be simpler to understand than the act of people writing about what they know best, their own lives? But this apparently simple act is anything but simple, for the writer becomes, in the act of writing, both the observing subject and the object of investigation, remembrance, and contemplation." I first encountered the Double/I exercise (Ibid., 213) in Assistant Professor Maureen Stanton's Graduate Seminar in Creative Nonfiction in the Fall of 2006 which spawned a creative nonfiction essay I mined for two accompanying autoethnographical performances titled "Eye See" and "All About Eyes." See also Bill Roorbach's ***Writing Life Stories: How to Make Memories into Memoirs, Ideas into Essays, and Life into Literature*** (Cincinnati, OH: Story Press, 1998).

[106] Ellis writes her autoethnography in the form of a novel. ***Women Writing Culture*** edited by Ruth Behar, a feminist ethnographer, and Deborah A. Gordon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), a feminist historian of anthropology, is a collection of women scholars' ethno- and autoethno- graphical writing, the forms of which go beyond the conventional academic essay ranging from literary expressions of memoir, fiction, plays, travelogues, and the like, refusing to "separate creative writing from critical writing" 7.

Ethnography finally appears to have taken its place in academia, no longer having to defend its existence as a method and a theory of understanding culture. As late twentieth/early twenty-first century political and technological events spurred ever faster change, the planet, shrinking, its inhabitants, multiplying exponentially, clustering ever closer together both geographically and technologically, a need arose for a less separatist, more fluid, multi-viewed way of writing about the world and its cultures.

In the decades since colonial rule, those cultures' inhabitants once studied from colonists' separatist viewpoints began writing about themselves, no longer needing or wanting a foreign anthropological/ethnographical viewpoint skewing their cultural history and heritage. Anthropologists turned away from the foreign, the exotic, the other, and recognized the multitude of cultures existing in their own lands. Learning a lesson from cultural politics and classicist hierarchy, they began recognizing that their presence within a studied culture altered viewpoint, that there is no such thing as unbiased observation, that no presence is without effect. Thus they began writing themselves into their ethnographies,

recognizing at long last, the "I" in the eye of the anthropologist, and the effect of that "I."

Some, intrigued with being allowed presence at long last and fascinated by their own personal point-of-view, took this developing practice a step further and began observing themselves as other, as other within a particular culture, as other within a particular time. Their experiments with self-observation became known as autoethnography. Never mind that this development in anthropological methods coincided with the arrival of the "me" generation, an examination of the self is perhaps the last truly unknown frontier on this planet. Along with these changes came allowance of different ways of writing about the self, about culture, about the world, changes that were less defining, more fluid, more interpretive.[107]

Ethnography can simply be defined as writing culture, which is essentially the way Carolyn Ellis defines it:

> "***Ethnography . . . means writing about*** or describing people and ***culture***, using firsthand observation and participation in a setting or situation. The term refers both to the process

[107] See Kamala Visweswaran, "Introduction," in ***Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*** (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994) 1-16; Trinh T. Minh-ha, "The Language of Nativism," in ***Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcolonity and Feminism*** (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1989), 47-76; and James Clifford, "Introduction," in ***Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography***, eds. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 2-26; for brief histories from varying viewpoints.

> of doing a study and to the written product"[108] (emphasis added).

This definition is, in fact, the title of two pivotal texts that analyze and demonstrate the ways ethnography is changing: ***Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography,*** edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus[109] and its responding text, ***Women Writing Culture,*** edited by Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon.[110]

Ethnography is both a method and a tool. It has been used in past anthropological research of exotic cultures and has now been updated for use in researching modern culture. Socio-anthropological studies recognize that modern society is composed of multiple cultures. The Padua

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[108] Ellis, 26. Note, also, that Ellis defines ethnography as both method and text.

[109] James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., ***Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*** (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

[110] Ruth Behar and Deborah A Gordon, eds., ***Women Writing Culture,*** Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). In a curious intersect of literary genre and anthropology, the "new ethnography" as discussed by Clifford in his introduction to ***Writing Culture*** (1-26), calls for anthropologists to write more experimentally, more innovatively, much as did the "new journalism" movement birth and term the now popular literary genre of creative nonfiction. In response to the male-dominated preceding collection, Behar states in her Introduction to ***Women Writing Culture*** that the collection refuses to "separate creative writing from critical writing" (7) thus beginning the curious mix of genre found in current ethnographic practices which will provide yet another model for gathering and presenting my collected information.

Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival was one such culture.

In addition to being a method and a tool, I also consider ethnography to be a writing style--a genre, distinct from nonfiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, prose, and occasionally drama. Its primary audience and purpose is scholarly as opposed to creative nonfiction, for instance, which has a broader, lay audience with a primary focus on artistic rendering.

By attaching "auto" to "ethnography," one can see that autoethnography is, simply stated, writing the culture of the self. Of course, nothing is that simple. There are as many definitions as there are theorists. Ellis defines autoethnography as ". . . research, writing, story, and method that connects the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social and political."[111]

Norman K. Denzin, concerned with self-conscious awareness of the moral and political presence of the researcher, states that "autoethnography reflexively inserts the researcher's biographical experiences into the

[111] Ellis, xix.

ethnographic . . . project,"[112] and thus blends biography into ethnography.

Deborah E. Reed-Danahay defines autoethnography as "a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context." And as Ellis implies above, Reed-Danahay further states, "It is both a method and a text, as in the case of ethnography."[113]

For this dissertation in which I examine the culture of the Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival as it once was as well as my own experience in that culture, Reed-Danahay's definition of autoethnography and Ellis's definition of ethnography seem most inclusive and the ones to which I adhere.

I interviewed participants, observed a festival of plays produced by two of the participants; composed field notes after interviewing and observing using "thick description";[114] perused my own previously written field

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[112] Norman K. Denzin, ***Performance Ethnography: Critical Pedagogy and the Politics of Culture*** (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003), 33.

[113] Deborah E. Reed-Danahay, "Introduction," in ***Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social*** (New York: Berg, 1997), 9.

[114] Clifford Geertz, ***The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*** (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 6-10. "In a Geertzian thick description of a cultural practice, the ethnographer employs two kinds of descriptive techniques. One consists of a wealth of finely observed particulars drawn from field work; the other generalizes and synthesizes, looking at the meanings of the particular against larger

notes written during my attendance at Padua and mined my own memory and perception to complete this study.

The campus Institutional Research Board (IRB) approved this project, assigning it "exempt" status, which simply means it is of low or no risk to the participants. I conducted interviews via E-Mail and telephone and in September 2007 attended the SITE (Seattle Indie Theatre Experiment) Specific Festival inspired by the Padua Hills Playwrights Festival in Seattle, Washington on the Seattle University campus. The festival was produced by my two primary participants, Ki Gottberg and Cheryl Slean, who also showcased their own work along with that of two other playwrights. I interviewed Slean and Gottberg in person at this time, enhancing my previous communications.

Structure and Organization

The most challenging aspect of this project was separating the scholar from the artist. Though I am a scholar-in-training, I consider myself an artist first,

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organizing phenomena that begin to address how the particulars of the cultural practice relate to large contextual features. As the ethnographer moves between these two planes, one particular, the other generalizing, he or she also constantly moves between considerations of what such a practice seems to mean in the eyes of those who perform in it and how it relates to practices familiar to the ethnographer, drawn from his or her culture." Quoting Carol Simpson Stern and Bruce Henderson, ***Performance: Texts and Contexts*** (New York: Longman, 1993), 54.

likely because I have been in training for creative expression much longer. As an artist, I am well aware that what is *not* revealed holds as much--sometimes more--import than what *is* revealed. Not so for scholarly endeavors. As a scholar-in-training, I have noticed that leaving *any* stone unturned creates a gaping hole in that research. This awareness has fueled a proclivity towards obsessive-compulsive-disorder. Knowing when to stop, how to rein in any kind of work, is a challenge. In scholarly writing, then, knowing when to stop becomes particularly difficult to gauge, especially if one has a preference for complex entanglement and multiplex logic that unravels and reveals slowly, rather than singular deductive logic that drives home a point in clearly outlined steps. As I see it, I have been thoroughly trained to "show, don't tell" which is the antithesis of what is required here.

To that end, by allowing my artistic side to engage in the work, I found myself needing to conceptualize this project as a complex, collaged play--a kaleidoscope of sorts--though the final product does not resemble a drama in any way, shape, or form. However, just as when I compose drama and must be driven by an underlying question or abstract thought, I found I had to devise an underlying

structure to this work in order to visualize its completion.

The first chapter is toploading--telling the whole story up front before breaking down into scenes. It occurred to me that I have used this strategy many times in my dramatic work (***Jukebox, The House that Jack Built, Leavin' On My Mind, Colleen Clipped***). In some, the strategy is more obvious than in others. I enjoy utilizing this structure as it enables me to view an entire work in what I call a "long lens"--much like a long shot in the beginning of a film--before breaking it into specific components. This strategy sets the world of the play, just as this first chapter sets the world of this work.

The middle chapters break down each element. In this case, Chapter Two introduces the first major character (who never really appears onstage)--Maria Irene Fornes. Because of her illness, I had to rely on scholarly research, oral interviews, and my own memory thus utilizing a combination of historical, ethnographic and autoethnographic methods. Because Fornes's voice cannot be heard except through the memories of others, this chapter, then, was the most challenging to write.

Chapter Three introduces the other underlying aspect--in a sense, the setting and its creator--the Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival and Murray Mednick. In this instance I had the privilege of interviewing founder Murray Mednick. In fact, I had no other option as there is no research in print available on Padua as I have previously stated. I also had the ability to mine the memories of my two lead characters who were participants at prior Padua Festivals as well as my own memory of attendance. Thus, with myself as both researcher and participant observer providing autoethnographic commentary, this chapter embodies ethnography methodology. The challenge here was the opposite from that of the Fornes chapter in that it is comprised solely from memory, oral interviews, and/or discussions with virtually no previous written research to balance viewpoint.

Chapters Four and Five consist of biographical backgrounds of playwrights Cheryl Slean and Ki Gottberg emphasizing their experiences at Padua with Maria Irene Fornes as teacher. Because of their deliberate focus on subject playwrights, these chapters are the least autoethnographic. Key are Fornesian and Paduan exercises described by Slean and Gottberg and how those exercises

intersected with their work. Short plays written directly as a result of specific exercises with accompanying analysis as to how that exercise became a springboard manifesting in that particular work constitute the meat of both these chapters.

Chapter Six is the autoethnographic chapter. In it I describe my various encounters with Maria Irene Fornes from San Francisco to Taxco, Mexico and chronicle my developing admiration for her work and her pedagogy. I also describe my experience at the Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival, particularly the classes taught by Fornes and Murray Mednick. The chapter ends with an act from a full-length play inspired directly from the last workshop I took with Fornes.

By a stroke of luck, as I was engaged in conceptualizing this project, uncertain as to how I would return to my original quest--how did the Padua/Fornes/Mednick pedagogy influence these playwrights--I discovered that Cheryl Slean and Ki Gottberg were co-producing the SITE Specific Festival of new work based on the Padua model which meant they, along with two other playwrights, would be writing new plays for particular outdoor locations at Seattle University. This chapter then

became the penultimate Chapter Seven which includes the two new SITE Specific plays written by Slean and Gottberg for the event.

The overall structure of this work is then:

Chapter One: Introduction

Chapter Two: Maria Irene Fornes

Chapter Three: The Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival and Founder, Murray Mednick

Chapter Four: Playwright Cheryl Slean and Play

Chapter Five: Playwright Ki Gottberg and Play

Chapter Six: Playwright Andréa J. Onstad and Play

Chapter Seven: SITE Specific Festival and Plays

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

Appendix A: IRB Preliminary E-Mail to Participants

Appendix B: IRB Consent Agreement

Appendix C: IRB Sample Interview Questions

Bibliography

CHAPTER TWO:
MARIA IRENE FORNES

> ". . . I've been saying words in my head to see if word spirits would come . . . to join other words that were there. . . . We just have to learn to listen and to let them come in easily because they . . . want to join other words to express something . . . of beauty or longing or despair."
>
> -- Maria Irene Fornes, Joseph in ***Letters from Cuba***, 2000[115]

Introduction

How to describe a problem like Maria?

Echoing Steven Drukman's playful mimic-lament, "How do you solve a problem like Maria?"[116] in his essay attempt to classify her plays,[117] this effort to sketch a portrait of the woman as an artist while she is silenced and invisible to most yet still among us must necessarily reverberate all that has been written about her before and hint at what may appear after, much like the referenced iconic tune itself echoes infinitely and soundlessly inside the mind by mere mention. And for those who are familiar with Fornes's

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[115] Fornes, Maria Irene, ***Letters from Cuba and Other Plays*** (New York: PAJ Publications, 2007), 10.

[116] "Maria," also known as "How Do You Solve a Problem Like Maria" is a show tune from the 1959 Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, ***The Sound of Music***. Lyrics were written by Oscar Hammerstein II.

[117] Drukman, 38

oeuvre, her early Judson Poet's Theatre musical theatre collaborations with Al Carmines and her later operatic lyrics echo as well.

Four adjectives recur in print, interview, and conversation referencing the work, the life, the person, Maria Irene Fornes. Just as her character, Joseph, describes in this chapter's opening quote above, the following four words, gifts from this work's talented word spirits, wish to join together to create that mysterious thing of great beauty, a word portrait of the word artist herself.

Luminous.

> I met Irene for the first time in the 60s in the lobby at Genesis or Judson. I remember how struck I was by the beauty of her face and her extraordinary--I'm not sure what the word is--luminosity comes close.
>
> -- Murray Mednick[118]

Inimitable.

> What makes the Ireneness of Irene? Those of us who have been lucky enough to work with her seem to have a shared shorthand: Irene is Queen, Irene is Irene, La Grande Irene, the inimitable Irene--our monikers affectionate and probably a

[118] Murray Mednick, E-Mail to Andréa J. Onstad, Subject: ***Padua Continued***, 2 September 2007.

little proprietary. . . . She is deeply herself--brilliance, eccentricities, and all.

- Molly Powell[119]

Formidable.

Irene was a formidable presence. You didn't want to cross her. I was worried about having to deal with her that summer in 1991 but Irene didn't produce so I didn't have to. I had heard stories about working with her and I was a little scared.

- Cheryl Slean[120]

I think she [Fornes] is one of the most formidable presences in theater in the world.

-- John Seitz[121]

Tough.

In my early workshop experiences with Irene, she was tough. She made me cry. . . . Later, after I'd gotten to know her, she told me, "The first thing you wrote was such a piece of shit. My god, it was terrible."

-- Ki Gottberg.[122]

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[119] Delgado and Svich, 95.

[120] Cheryl Slean, Interview by Andréa J. Onstad, Telephone, 5 December 2005.

[121] Robert Coe, The Realm of the Unanswered: Actors on Fornes," in *The Theatre of Maria Irene Fornes*, ed. Marc Robinson (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 166.

[122] Ki Gottberg, Interview with Andréa J. Onstad, Telephone, 9 December 2005.

Luminous. Inimitable. Formidable. Tough. An advocate of the concrete determinator rather than the descriptive modifier, Maria "call me Irene" Fornes,[123] gifted teacher that she was, would likely have created a visualization writing exercise to accompany these adjectives and after a brief yoga meditation would have her students draw the portrait with both words and line scribbles, asking questions such as "Are the eyes blue or brown or are they a peculiar shade of green mixed with lavender?" causing such particularity that one would indeed wind up with a portrait and a character and eventually a moment, a scene, maybe even a play.

The "problem" of Maria at this writing is that, as mentioned previously, she has succumbed to Alzheimer's disease and is currently residing in an adult care facility in Oneonta, upstate New York.[124] She has her protectors and her proponents, neither of whom are willing to share

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[123] Michelle Memran, "About the Film," ***"The Rest I Make Up": Documenting Irene,*** http://www.documentingirene.com, accessed 1 October 2007.

From this point forward, Maria Irene Fornes, Fornes, and Irene may be used interchangeably. Most of my interviewees called her Irene and I quote them exactly. When I am writing about her as a scholarly object, I will use the name, Fornes, except for those biographical passages in which identifying her by her last name would unnecessarily confuse her with other members of her family. When I am writing about her from a personal autoethnographic stance, I will use the name, Irene.

[124] Memran, "Production Log."

information. The two most recent books (with the exception of two collections of her plays published in 2007 and 2008) that appeared around the time of her Signature Theatre retrospective, 2000, which was also about the time the disease first became apparent, were homage, tribute, and compilation, rather than critical, and as Drukman in his essay mentioned above stated, both "wisely sidestep any sort of critical closure."[125] This avoidance of critical commentary makes summary slippery and elusive much like stepping on eggs, some of which have cracked. Her memory, both literal and what is held within the minds of those who knew her, is in danger of evaporating all together. The protective force around her is fierce and impenetrable as well as censoring. This unspoken rule of censorship may be because it is too painful to speak or write in the past tense about someone still living--indeed, there were tears in everyone's eyes when Michelle Memran's videobiography clip was shown at Dr. Gwendolyn Alker's Maria Irene Fornes 2006 ATHE panel--or it may be litigious. In any case, no answers to the current state of her well-being or her writing are forthcoming.

[125] Drukman, 36, 38.

To better bridge the gap between the functioning Fornes and her current state, I asked my interviewees if they remembered the last time they saw her. I also recalled my own last encounter. Our words were collectively therapeutic and give homage to this once powerful teacher.

The last time John O'Keefe saw and talked to Fornes (and they had talked on the telephone every month over the years since their first Padua connection) was on April 19, 2002 at the opening of his play, ***Glamour***, at the Ohio Theater in New York.

> She showed signs of being a bit outside of clock time as she came to the box office forty-five minutes early. She seemed cogent and witty, the very darling that Irene can be when she feels that way. At the end of the play she told me that it was amazing and that she didn't know how I did it. Now that could be construed as being less than acute but again she might have simply and suddenly become aware of my genius. Seriously, I found her thinner than I remember, a bit confused about the time. When I commented that I thought she looked good she answered, 'people think I don't look good.' She recognized me and I was glad to be able to give her a big hug.[126]

Murray Mednick reported seeing her for the last time during the filming of Memran's videobiography. Lost for

[126] John O'Keefe, E-Mail to Andréa J. Onstad, Subject: ***Irene Question***, 7 October 2007.

words, he said simply the moment Irene recognized him was priceless.[127]

Ki Gottberg recalls:

> . . . the last time I saw her she came and stayed with me at my house here [Seattle] and of course I gave her our bed because I wanted her to be comfortable and my husband and I slept in another room and she reminded me so much of what it was like to go--because I visited her many times in New York--I'd go to New York every year and see her when her mother was alive and you know her mother had been at my house but I had total flashback because she was in my bed, you know, little Irene, and I felt like I was Irene and she was her mother because whenever I would go and visit her there would her mother be--her little mother--her beautiful mother--[128] She gave me a bottle of Tabu once as a gift--so so dear and her mother was in her 90s when they were one time at my house and it was just shortly after I married and I remember her mother dancing with my husband and after sighing in broken English, "Oh young men . . ."[129]

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[127] Murray Mednick, E-Mail to Andréa J. Onstad, Subject: ***Irene, Padua, and Diss-Land,*** 15 October 2007.

[128] Fornes's mother did not speak English but Ki, an excellent mimic, imitates her breathy voice perfectly and did so for the tape. However, it is not transcribable.

[129] Ki Gottberg and Slean Cheryl, Personal Interview by Andréa J. Onstad, Seattle University, Lee Center for the Arts, Seattle, Washington, 22 September 2007. Carmen, Fornes's mother, was famous not only for her flirtations and effect on younger men (see Leo Garcia's account of his first meeting with her in Delgado and Svich's ***Conducting a Life***, 45-47) but also for her ability to smooth the feathers ruffled by her often brusque daughter. Paul Bernstein describing his time spent as Irene's driver at the 1987 Bay Area Playwrights Festival in ***Conducting a Life***, believes it was through her mother that he was able to feel and experience Irene's warmth. Delgado and Svich, 165-170.

As for me, the last time I saw Irene was in 1998 at the Latin American Writers' Workshop in Taxco, Mexico. Here I encountered a different, softer Irene, than I ever had in the past. Her hair was longer, curled under. She laughed more and was far more accessible. A group of us would hang out in the bar, drink Micheladas, laugh and cry and marvel over Taxco's claim of hosting a rumored Kennedy-Monroe tryst decades ago and then drink some more. I thought it was Mexico. Maybe it was the beer. In any case, whatever hampered me from enjoying Irene in the past, vanished completely.

For class, we would meet in the school's sculpture studio, a particularly appropriate location, accessed by walking through lush foliage, past fallen statues, figures leaning against walls, bougainvillea bowing low, weaving its vines through the broken clay. One day in particular, January 13, 1998 according to my notebook, [130] while Irene was talking about all sorts of things, I scribbled some of her words and drew--just as she recommended--and wound up with a caricature of her, my last image of Irene.

The following, in keeping with the interest of this work, provides brief biographical and historical

[130] Andréa J. Onstad, ***Taxco: Latin American Writers' Workshop Notebook,*** Unpublished, 1998, p. 81.

background, pedagogical analysis, writing theory, and autoethnographical and personal commentary of participants in Fornes's writing workshops.

Biographical Background--Pedagogical Legacy

The youngest of six children, María Irene Fornés[131] was born on May 14, 1930, in Havana, Cuba. Her mother, Carmen Hismenia (Collado) and her father, Carlos Luis Fornés were "poor but unconventional,"[132] and from all accounts, Bohemian.

The possibility of upper-class status towards which the Fornés family had been striving was halted when Irene's paternal grandmother fell in love and eloped to Tampa, Florida, with a man of lower social class standing and no interest in improving his lot. Both her paternal grandparents had spent part of their childhood in the United States; her grandmother managed to receive a post-secondary education at St. Joseph's Academy while the family was living in Baltimore. In Tampa, after her

[131] Fornes dropped the accents in her name in 1971 after the anthology, ***Promenade and Other Plays***, was published. Kent, 86. Unless otherwise noted, all biographical information is obtained from this source which is, to date, definitive. Kent interviwed Fornes extensively in 1993 and from that data constructed this thorough history which has not yet been superseded.

[132] Ibid., 63.

marriage, Irene's grandmother discovered she needed to support her family because her husband's wages at the cigar factory were not enough for them to get by nor did his employment prove lasting. So, putting her education to work, she began to teach school. Later, when the family moved back to Havana, Irene's grandmother opened her own school which in a short time became very prestigious. She spoke fluent American-English and taught it. American English was in great demand. Her daughters both became teachers. Thus began the pedagogical legacy with teaching and learning paramount. Teaching was in Maria Irene Fornes's DNA.

Unlike his sisters, Irene's father, Carlos, followed closely in the footsteps of his leisure-loving father. He attended school for a grand total of twenty-one days, preferring a hands-on education, reading what he wanted and discussing it with whomever he came in contact, traveling and observing, several times traveling and living in the United States before he was seventeen.

In direct contrast to her somewhat privileged father, Irene's mother, Carmen Collado, was orphaned by the time she was nine. Placed in a convent along with another sister, she was not allowed "to even look out the window

until she was nineteen . . . eleven years like in a prison."[133] After this unconventional incarceration, she began teaching in Carlos's mother's school. Carlos, returning to Havana from the United States about this time, met Carmen at the school. The two fell in love. Carlos, however, had signed up for a stint in the United States Army. Two years later, when he returned, they married.

Carlos held various low-paying bureaucratic government jobs throughout their marriage but much of the time he was unemployed. Carmen quit teaching to raise the six children. During the Great Depression years they were very poor. The children rarely attended school. Fornes attended Havana Escuela Publica No. 12 from the third to sixth grade. Both parents home schooled the children. Neither approved of the quality of the public schools but they did not have money for their private counterparts. Carlos, a "natural philosopher,"[134] held family poetry contests. He loved to read and did so constantly, after which he'd discuss what he read with his children. He also loved to cook, and her mother enjoyed carpentry. Neither

[133] Ibid., 67, quoting Fornes.

[134] Ibid., 68, quoting Fornes.

were the least concerned that these interests were outside the norm. Irene, incidentally, likes to do both.

This unconventional upbringing and the freedom that went along with it paved the way for Fornes's immersion and survival in the do-it-yourself Off-Off Broadway movement of the 1960s and was instrumental in her longevity and fortitude in continuing to do her work long after the movement waned and vanished. She says:

> There was no such thing as Bohemian life in Havana [at that time]. Neither my father nor my mother thought they were living in any special style, but they were. They were never concerned about ordinary, everyday, normal things. . . . It wasn't that there was a special emphasis on the arts, no not that at all. But the difference with my parents--*in* my parents--was their thinking, the way they thought about life.[135]

It wasn't until her family saw the film, ***You Can't Take it With You***, that they understood themselves--poor but privileged by education and culture. Hers was not a poverty mentality.

In 1945, Carlos Fornes suffered a heart attack and died at age fifty-three. Some sources say Carmen left for New York with all the children, other sources say she left with four children, but most say she left with Irene and

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[135] Ibid., 71, quoting Fornes in Kevin Kelly, "Seeking to Sail the Mainstream," ***The Boston Globe*** (7 January 1990), A8.

one sister. In any case, Carmen, Irene, and at least one sister arrived in New York in late 1945 and rented a basement apartment in the South Bronx. A year later they bought an apartment in upper Manhattan, the term "bought" carrying a different notion of ownership akin to the type of ownership one has when purchasing a condo today--one does not own the land but owns the right to the air space occupied by the apartment and still must pay a monthly rent or fee. The housing shortage had already begun.

Irene was awarded a scholarship to St. Joseph's Academy High School of Washington Square. A chip off the block, she lasted six weeks. She explains:

> The nuns gave me ***Little Women*** to read and I couldn't begin to understand it. I was bored to death and got a job before it was legal for me to work.[136]

She was to work at a series of odd jobs in offices and factories for several years.

In one of the several writing workshops I took with her, I recall her describing one such job where she said she was so bored she stood by the window for hours watching traffic until she was finally fired. I can still picture her standing by the window of the workshop studio where she

[136] Maria Irene Fornes, "The Conduct of Life," in ***On New Ground: Contemporary Hispanic-American Plays***, ed. M. Elizabeth Osborn (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1987), 47.

told the story, almost as if she were reliving that experience. It resonated within me for I held a boring office job at the time of her telling and often stared out the high rise windows at the San Francisco traffic and the lights as they flickered on in the early winter evenings, imagining I was looking at my own personal Diebenkorn painting.

At nineteen, Irene began studying painting with Abstract Expressionist painter Hans Hofmann, and continued studying with him when he moved to Provincetown, Massachusetts. In 1951 she became a naturalized citizen. At age twenty-three she moved to Europe to further her painting studies.

The often-cited account of her exposure to theatre which became the impetus for her change in artistic career, the production which inspired so many of her era, including Edward Albee, to name just one, was her viewing of the original Roger Blin production of ***Waiting for Godot*** in Paris, 1954. In the previously cited 1985 interview with Scott Cummings, she stated:

> The first thing that I saw that stirred me deeply was in Paris: ***Waiting for Godot***--in French--Roger Blin's original production in 1954. I didn't know a word of French. I had not read the play in English. But what was happening in front of me had a profound impact without even

> understanding a word. Imagine a writer whose theatricality is so amazing and so important that you could see a play of his, not understand one word, and be shook up. When I left that theater I felt that my life was changed, that I was seeing everything with a different clarity.[137]

Upon returning to New York in 1957, she re-immersed herself in the Bohemian life of Greenwich Village and worked as a self-employed textile designer. Not yet a playwright, she was aware she lacked the passion to be a painter.[138] She alludes to this in several interviews but most directly in Cummings':

> . . . I always had to force myself to work. I never found that place where you're touching on something vital to your own survival, to your own life.[139]

That winter she saw Burgess Meredith's 1958 New York production of ***Ulysses in Nighttown*** adapted by Marjorie Barkentin from James Joyce's novel. The fact that it was not presented in a theatre likely contributed to her lifelong penchant for seeking alternative theatrical spaces in which to stage her plays. In the previously cited 1988

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[137] Cummings (Clarity), 52.

[138] Biographical Notes, http://www.mariaireneforness.com/biographicalnotes.html, accessed 19 September 2005.

[139] Cummings (Clarity), 52.

interview with David Savran she describes the alternative production space and its effect on her:

> It was performed in a place--on West Houston Street, I think--that was not ordinarily used as a theatre. And that, too, had a profound effect on me. But I still didn't want to write a play. I just thought, "How wonderful, what an incredible thing."[140]

It wouldn't be until 1959 or 1960, she herself is uncertain,[141] that she wrote her first play, ***Tango Palace***. She describes its emergence in the Cummings interview:

> It didn't happen because I thought I wanted to be a playwright. I just got this obsessive idea, as if you have a nightmare and for a while you can't shake it. It's something so strong that it's in front of you all the time. You are obsessed with it. Only it was not a nightmare. It was an obsession that took the form of a play and I felt I had to write it. It was like that. That was ***Tango Palace***.[142]

Originally titled, ***There! You Died!***, the play, retitled, was produced in 1963 at the Actors Workshop in San Francisco, directed by Herbert Blau. In keeping with its European influence, local reviewers promptly labeled it

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[140] Savran, 54-55.

[141] Ibid., 55.

[142] Cummings (Clarity), 51.

"theater of the absurd."[143] It was performed in 1964 at the Actors Studio in New York City where she was a member of the Playwrights Unit, and again in 1965 at the Firehouse in Minneapolis.

Hooked on the dramatic art form, Fornes abandoned painting and went on to become a major force in American theatre, writing over forty plays, collecting nine Obies, numerous grants and fellowships, enjoying a retrospective of her work at the Signature Theatre in 2000, and directing and teaching her unique style of playwriting all over the country in a career that lasted almost forty years.

It is astonishing to think, now, that a playwright's first play can be produced so easily, not only once but several times, and that a produced playwright's subsequent plays always find production, again, seemingly easily.

It is important to consider factors contributing to the birth of any artist or any outstanding individual or movement. More than simply triumph of will, many influences factor into the development of any life at any given moment in time. Factors such as politics, economics, environment, heritage, population, world events both

[143] Scott T. Cummings, "Maria Irene Fornes," in ***American Playwrights Since 1945: A Guide to Scholarship, Criticism, and Performance***, ed. Philip C. Kolin (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1989), 114.

critical and encouraging, all can have a profound effect and their influence can be felt over many lifetimes. Our lives are really so very short in the grand scheme of it all.

The post-World War II era spawned a worldwide art explosion and a "craving for experience."[144] Music--Elvis Presley and Rock and Roll; art--Jackson Pollock and the wave of abstract painters; literature--1957, Jack Kerouac's ***On the Road,*** to name only a pivotal few, helped create an atmosphere of creative experimentation. Building from the early twentieth century movements--symbolism, surrealism, futurism, Dadaism, and on to absurdism, coupled with the horror and despair following two world wars, the art scene exploded like the bomb itself. Artists, the pulse of culture and society, expressed reaction to the world around them. A few pivotal souls, destined to become icons, paved the way. Experimentation in theatre, building off its earlier turn-of-the-twentieth-century influences such as the Provincetown Players, again erupted in the already established Bohemian area of Greenwich Village in an effort to combat the boredom and ennui of the fare offered on Broadway.

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[144] Joyce Johnson, "Remembering Jack Kerouac," in ***Smithsonian*** (September 2007): 117.

As Fornes said one day in the 1998 Latin American Writers' Workshop in Taxco, Mexico, which I attended and referred to above, there were only a handful of playwrights in the early 1960s. It was easier to produce the work. The rules, laws, and building code violations had not yet been written. Today there are thousands of people calling themselves playwrights, with MFA programs churning out more and more every year. That makes the competition so much tougher; the likelihood of readings let alone productions so much slimmer.

In the 1960s, there were few who called themselves "artists" in any category. Today the word is cheapened, nearly meaningless. Everyone who accesses their subconscious or who dabbles in any sort of creativity is an artist. The drive to be called "artist" has caused art to become a "career" rather than a passion with life-long dedication and sacrifice. One can now pay thousands of dollars in tuition to schools that in the 1960s were havens for those who desired to study their art. Now, these schools are out-priced for all but the upper class. Now, one can buy the title "artist." Even with thousands of these artists, their purchased titles flooding galleries, theatres, music halls, there are very few who remain if

financial rewards and ego acclaim are not immediately forthcoming. Those that do, who have dedicated their entire lives to their passion with discipline and sacrifice without reaping financial reward and acclaim, can truly be called "artist." Maria Irene Fornes is such a one. She has been called "underappreciated"[145] and described herself to John O'Keefe, as "America's oldest emerging artist."[146]

Writing Pedagogy

That the uneducated Cuban emigrant artist started writing in the first place is nothing short of remarkable. As mentioned in Chapter One, Maria Irene Fornes first put pen to paper in 1961 while she was living with Susan Sontag.[147] The often-cited legend referred to above first appeared in print in critic Ross Wetzsteon's essay, "The Elements of Style," published in ***The Village Voice***,

[145] Marc Robinson, "Preface," in ***The Theater of Maria Irene Fornes***, ed. Marc Robinson (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), ix.

[146] John O'Keefe, Telephone Interview, 14 October 2006.

[147] That Susan Sontag and Fornes were lovers was no secret among playwrights who studied with her and other theatre professionals who worked with her. Nevertheless, it was not a fact that was openly admitted. More often, it was simply alluded to; for instance, they were referred to as "roommates" in the Wetzsteon article. Not until excerpts of Sontag's diaries were published in ***The New York Times Magazine*** on September 10, 2006, following her death on December 28, 2004, was their affair made public in print. ***Reborn: Journals and Notebooks, 1947-1963***, the first volume of her journal edited by her son, David Reiff, was published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, in 2008.

April 29, 1986 and bears full quotation here in its charming, semi-dramatic form:

> Spring 1961. A warm Saturday night. The Café Figaro. Irene and Susan have come down to the Village from the apartment they share on West End Avenue to hang out over a couple of cups of coffee, to see if anyone'll invite them to a party.
>
> Irene immediately notices that Susan's restless, distracted. 'What's wrong?'
>
> Susan's feeling a little depressed, nothing to worry about.
>
> 'But why? What's bothering you?'
>
> Well, she wants to write a novel, but hasn't been able to get started.
>
> 'I didn't know you wanted to write a novel,' Irene says. They've been living together for several months, Irene painting, Susan teaching philosophy at Columbia, but this'd never come up before.
>
> 'Well, what are you waiting for?'
>
> The usual things--she has to get settled first.
>
> 'How silly. If you want to write, why not just sit down and write?'
>
> Susan laughs. Sure.
>
> 'You think I'm kidding. We're going to finish our coffee, go back to the apartment, and you're going to write.'
>
> At that moment--'just like the devil,' Irene thinks, tempting them from their path--a friend stops by, tells them about a party. Why don't they come?

> We'd love to, Susan says. 'No,' Irene says firmly, 'we have to go home to write.'
>
> 'Just to show you how easy it is,' Irene says when they get back to the apartment, 'I'll write something too.' She's never written anything before but she wants to help Susan get started. She almost feels like she's babysitting.
>
> They sit on opposite sides of a large table in the kitchen. Susan knows exactly what she wants to do--she begins work on her first novel. Irene doesn't know what to write about, so on an impulse she takes down a cookbook, opens it at random, and decides to write a short story by making herself use the first word of every sentence.
>
> Susan Sontag would have become a writer in any case--it just took that Saturday night at the Figaro to get her started--but Maria Irene Fornes still wonders if she would have become a playwright if she and Susan had gone off to that party. 'I had all this creative energy that I had to use. I never really loved painting. Still, I might never have even thought of writing if I hadn't pretended I was going to show Susan how easy it was.'[148]

It is easy to see from this anecdote how Fornes's teaching evolved organically from her natural instincts. If one considers her teaching heritage, it is clear her style and manner of both writing and teaching both came

[148] Wetzsteon, 42-45. Note that Fornes tells the story somewhat differently, small details varying slightly, in her interview with Maria M. Delgado in Brighton and London on October 26, 1997 entitled "Maria Irene Fornes Discusses Forty Years in Theatre with Maria M. Delgado," in ***Conducting a Life: Reflections on the Theatre of Maria Irene Fornes***, eds. Maria M. Delgado and Caridad Svich (Lyme, New Hampshire: Smith and Kraus, Inc., 1999) 248-277. However, due to its playful form, it seems clear that Wetzsteon was slightly fictionalizing the charming legend.

together in this one moment at the kitchen table where she essentially taught Sontag to write (that is, led her to the process with inspiration and discipline)[149] and began writing herself by playing games to jump-start the process. She has used variations of those same tactics ever since, preferring always to write around a table with others like-focused and to trigger the imagination and subconscious by constructing games and exercises, often picking words and sentences out of a book at random, just as she did this very first time.

It would be interesting to compare the results of this first writing attempt to that of her first avant-garde play produced two years later, ***Tango Palace*** (originally titled ***There! You Died***), directed by Herbert Blau at the San Francisco Actors Workshop.[150] It would be curious to see if

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[149] In the 1996 interview with Una Chaudhuri, when asked by Chaudhuri, "What is the role of teaching in your life? How does your teaching relate to your writing?", Fornes responded, "I like to share my own discoveries about writing, because that's what teaching is, to show the students some possibilities. Or even to give them the desire to find their own way to go about writing." Chaudhuri, 104.

[150] In fact, technically ***The Widow*** was Fornes's first finished play. It was based on "her translation of letters 'written by my great-grandfather from a cousin who lived in Spain.'" The play was produced in New York, broadcast on radio in Mexico and won Fornes two writing awards. It was not included in her first published anthology, ***Promenade and Other Plays*** (1971) because she was still reworking it. Curiously, her last play titled, ***Letters From Cuba***, was also comprised of a translation of letters. These were letters sent to her from her eldest brother, Raphael, covering a twenty year time span. Thus this play is autobiographical and something of a capstone to her oeuvre. Kent, 92, quoting Besko and Koenig, 155.

this first writing experiment carried the seeds of the play. Apparently, however, no copy exists.

She describes the writing process of *Tango Palace* as an "obsession" that overtook her for nineteen days. It is not clear when this "obsession" began--some sources state 1963 while others including the David Savran interview state it began in either 1959 or 1960. In any case, it was very near the time of this first writing experiment. She said:

> Then in 1960, or may be it was 1961, I had an idea for a play. I was obsessed with it. And I started writing it. Most of the people I knew, especially writers, said, 'Theatre's a very difficult medium. You have to learn how to write a play, otherwise it won't be put on.' I thought that was very funny because I never thought that I would write a play to put on. I had to write this play because I had to write this play. It was as personal as that. I never thought of a career or a profession. So I wrote it. And writing it was the most incredible experience. A door was opened which was a door to paradise.[151]

She provides more visceral detail regarding this experience in the 1985 Cummings interview stating:

> One day I started writing it. It was a weekend and I worked all day Saturday and all day Sunday. Monday I called my job and said I was sick. I didn't go to work for nineteen days. I only went out to buy groceries. I didn't want to do

[151] Savran, 55.

> anything but write. It was beautiful. . . incredible.[152]

Tango Palace was the only work Fornes wrote that started out with a "clear, conscious idea,"[153] an important distinction from her other work which stemmed from various open-ended writing exercises or experiments. As she gained experience, she preferred to be less manipulative and described her job as a playwright "as akin to that of a permissive parent, allowing her 'children' to run and play rather than forcing behavioral patterns on them."[154]

Less than four years after the success of this first writing experiment, in 1965, Fornes won her first Obie for *Promenade*, with music by the Reverend Al Carmines, produced at the Judson Church in New York City. Its success caused it to be moved uptown where it inaugurated the new Promenade Theatre. Here it ran for 259 performances, becoming her "first and only true commercial hit."[155] After the success of *Promenade*, her play, *The Office*, directed by Jerome Robbins, was scheduled to open on Broadway at the

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[152] Cummings (Clarity), 51.

[153] Stephen J. Bottoms, *Playing Underground: A Critical History of the 1960s Off-Off Broadway Movement* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2004), 140.

[154] Ibid.

[155] Cummings, *American Playwrights*, 114-115.

Henry Miller Theatre, but closed during previews. None of her other plays were ever produced on Broadway.

Fornes became the Judson's resident costume designer from 1965-1971. Also in 1965, she began teaching at the Teachers and Writers Collective in New York as well as at theatre festivals and workshops. In these venues and at the Judson Workshop where she began teaching the following year, she started developing the exercises and pedagogical style destined to become legendary.

The writing of *Promenade* epitomizes Fornesian technique. Desiring to access her creativity but not wanting to write another "idea play," she devised a card game in which she wrote character types and settings on index cards, shuffled them, and dealt out one of each for each scene. The first cards she dealt were "The Aristocrats" and "The Prison." The setting was easy, a prison, but a scene with aristocrats in prison proved difficult. She wanted to help them. So the first scene she wrote was the aristocrats digging a hole to escape. After that, she found using the character cards did not help advance the play so she abandoned the character deck and dealt only from the place card deck. As a result, the play has six different locations. She discovered this

process allowed her analytical mind to step aside and let something else happen that was not so controlling and manipulative. Only after the creation had begun did she find it useful to re-engage her analytical abilities.[156]

For a brief time in the mid-1960s, Fornes formally studied theatre. She observed scenework at the Actor's Studio in order to learn about the actor-director relationships and the rehearsal process. She became a member of the Actor's Studio Playwrights Unit. She also took a beginning acting course which included many sensory exercises and a directing course at Gene Frankel's school which based its curriculum on Strasberg's Method. While she was interested in learning how to convey psychological truths through her characters and to stage motivated behaviors it is a misconception to label Fornes's writing techniques as solely Method-based. Fornes later believed there was too much psychological-analytical thought imposed on characters--that a scene could simply be a moment without intense wanting, stating in her 1998 Taxco workshop: "Moments in characters' lives--that is the real drama in theatre."[157] And further, in the Cummings

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[156] Creese, 29-30.

[157] Onstad (*Taxco*), 41.

interview, she stated that the emphasis on psychology since the early twentieth century was crippling:

> Psychological analysis always looks for the ugly. When psychological meaning is applied to my work, I always end up seeming brutal.[158]

In the meantime, however, she learned a great deal from Lee Strasberg about working with actors, and, as noted previously, this helped her writing style to become more "organic" [159] and less "manipulative."[160]

Although it is evident that her extensive use of writing exercises was inspired, at least in part, by her experience at the Actors Studio, it is important to recognize that this did not make her a Method writer. Her intent in studying the process was to learn how to concentrate on the moment and avoid contrivance. Fornes stated in the 1997 interview with Maria M. Delgado:

> Lee Strasberg may have limited his interests to psychological social drama but his intelligence, sensitivity, and sophistication in regard to the quality of acting was superb. He was a genius at inventing and developing exercises to keep the students focus on a genuine creative goal. That is, I suppose, the opposite of imitation and fakery. . . . The main point of my exercises is

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[158] Wetzsteon, 37.

[159] Cummings (Clarity), 52.

[160] Ibid.

> the same as acting, to try to stop people from concentrating on the result.[161]

Fornes attended the Actor's Studio to learn about acting and actors. Though she was impressed with his work with actors, she did not agree with everything Strasberg said, especially when it concerned aesthetics, commenting to Cummings:

> My own personal taste was already quite developed. I was an artist, I lived in an artistic world, my artistic taste was already extremely sophisticated. In the theater I was green but not artistically.[162]

She took what was relevant to her from Strasberg's acting pedagogy and applied that knowledge to her own developing writing pedagogy.

The first play Fornes wrote after studying at the Actor's Studio was ***The Successful Life of Three***, produced by the Open Theatre and directed by Joseph Chaikin. She had joined the Open Theatre in 1963 but quickly realized the primary members, Chaikin and Jean-Claude Van Itallie (the Open Theatre's principal playwright and Chaikin's partner), were not interested in her words or ideas except as found text, in addition to which she was already

[161] Delgado and Svich, 271.

[162] Ibid.

developing as a director. Chaikin disagreed with Fornes regarding the use of Method techniques. Fornes believed that the techniques were applicable to all forms of theatre, not only naturalism and realism. She also believed, however, in aesthetic awareness and understanding that imagination is a part of everyday life. Nevertheless, Chaikin directed the first production of ***The Successful Life of Three*** wherein Fornes applied the Method technique for the actor directly to her writing. She defended her belief in the versatility of the Method techniques in the Cummings interview:

> What one character says to another comes completely out of his own impulse and so does the other character's reply. The other character's reply never comes from some sort of premeditation on my part or even the part of the character. The characters have no mind. They are simply doing what Strasberg always called "moment to moment."[163]

Fornes's experience with the directing workshop was quite another story and became the impetus for her decision to direct her own work. The first time she heard actors read her work was in the Actor's Studio director's workshop. When the actress finished, Fornes jumped up, told her how wonderful it was but could she perhaps try

[163] Cummings (Clarity), 53.

something else, and went on to give a few suggestions. Everyone else in the room went silent. The director then politely told her to give her comments to him later. "This seemed to me like the most absurd thing in the world."[164] Taking the course, she said, just meant:

> . . . you get the experience of not knowing what to say to an actor. You're going to go through that anyway, you might as well go through it at school.[165]

Fornes never saw the difference between writing and directing. To her, one was the extension of the other. To continue working on the play in rehearsal and on its feet was completely natural. However, it would be five years from her first production before she would direct her own work.

In 1968, a time when the freedom of writers was already disappearing and theatre was becoming a director's medium,[166] ***Molly's Dream*** was given a second production at New Dramatists where Fornes was a member. The first

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[164] Ibid., 52.

[165] Ibid., 53.

[166] ". . . [D]irector-led performance work . . . became the new 'big idea' among many theater scholars during the 1960s: 'We were carving out a domain for ourselves, overthrowing the writers,' Richard Schechner, both a critic and a director, has famously claimed of this period." Bottoms, 4; citing Schechner, "The Decline and Fall of the (American) Avant-Garde" in ***Performing Arts Journal*** 5, no. 2 (1981): 55.

production, an elaborate staged reading at Tanglewood in connection with Boston University, was disastrous until she stopped being timid and stepped in, creating havoc with the director but saving the play, a lesson which taught her to never give in again. When New Dramatists did not want her to direct, however, she started screaming, "I'm directing or I'm quitting. If this is a playwrights' organization, you have to do what is good for playwrights."[167] They made an exception for her. From then on she made a practice of directing the first and often second production of all her plays, in each, further developing and honing the play until she was satisfied, much as a painter will work a canvas until it reaches that state of unified completion. She told Delgado:

> [Directing is part of the writing process] with a new play. A play is not really finished until it is on a stage. No matter how much experience you have. You have to see it on a stage before you know the work is done.[168]

Though the production was not reviewed, which was common for New Dramatists presentations, playwright Robert Patrick remembers it as:

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[167] Savran, 60.

[168] Delgado and Svich, 261.

> . . . the greatest play I ever saw. Produced as Irene wanted it, with the people she wrote it for, it was beyond doubt the single most perfect and memorable and dazzling production of any play I've ever seen anywhere in the world.[169]

Robert Patrick's remembrance is testament to her abilities to blend writing and directing, the directing, essentially, a rewrite process.

Despite apparent success--her established plays running at various venues throughout the country and the completion of several new plays--Fornes began feeling stuck. By 1969, she felt that she had begun to repeat herself. Thus, until 1977 with her breakthrough play, ***Fefu and Her Friends***, she did not produce anything of note. Part of this hiatus from playwriting was a result of her involvement with the political aspects of the Off-Off Broadway movement, particularly the formation of two theatre groups, the Women's Theater Council and its successor, the New York Theater Strategy, both of which took up much of her time.

The Women's Theater Council was formed in 1972 along with Megan Terry, Rosalyn Drexler, Julie Bovasso, Adrienne Kennedy, and Rochelle Owens to offset the takeover by

[169] Bottoms, 353.

directors who were transforming plays into unrecognizable hash, with women playwrights in particular discovering they had to make "horrible compromises to get produced" [170] and then only to have their plays turned into "vehicle[s] for feminine violation."[171] Inspired in part by Fornes's artistic success with ***Molly's Dream***, the idea was that writers should have control over their projects. However, the group could not get funding because they had no track record even though all of the playwrights had had numerous productions and collectively had garnered five Obies. They then joined forces with their male counterparts of the Off-Off-Broadway movement who shared the same concerns, Sam Shepard, Ed Bullins, Murray Mednick, to name a few, and formed the New York Theatre Strategy. After producing an unfunded, five-week revival of favorite plays from the 1960s, the group was funded and the next year produced four full productions. Bovasso initially held office as President of the New York Theater Strategy, but Fornes, who ran the organization almost single-handedly for five of its six years of existence (1972-1979), took over as President

[170] Kent quoting Megan Terry and Rosalyn Drexler in Mel Gussrow's "New Group to Offer Plays by Women," ***New York Times***, 22 February 1971, 44.

[171] Ibid.

in 1973 with Murray Mednick, Vice President. During this time, Fornes learned every aspect of theatre management. The New York Theatre Strategy was a production organization which produced the plays of its members. The production schedule was very heavy. Fornes was everything, "the office, the fundraiser, the production coordinator, the bookkeeper, the secretary, the everything. I did everything."[172]

During this time, she continued teaching writing workshops and honing her pedagogical approach. She began adding the yoga exercises and visualization techniques that became her trademark and adapted Method and improvisational acting exercises into writing exercises.

Also during this time, she began her "long-standing association with the Hispanic American Arts Center. INTAR (International Art Relations)"[173] with two productions: ***Cap-a-Pie*** (Head to Foot) in 1975 and ***Lolita in the Garden*** in 1977. In 1980, a writers' unit pilot project was instigated at INTAR by director Max Ferrá and Fornes. Fornes had been insisting there were no role models for a Hispanic theatrical sensibility but that they could be

[172] Cummings (Clarity), 55.

[173] Kent, 151.

developed through developing Hispanic playwrights. In the short biography she provided for ***On New Ground: Contemporary Hispanic-American Plays*** edited by M. Elizabeth Osborn she states:

> . . . Hispanic theatre in this country could never develop, could never be called a serious institution unless it had its own playwrights. No theatre can become strong if it only does classics or plays from other countries.[174]

Through this project, she began looking for and allowing this sensibility to emerge. The project became the famed Hispanic Writers-in-Residence Laboratory, also known as the INTAR Hispanic Playwrights-in-Residence Lab (HPRL),[175] and was run by Fornes until 1994.[176] Through INTAR's doors passed the likes of Cherríe Moraga, Migdalia Cruz, and Nilo Cruz who guaranteed the "Hispanic sensibility" had been achieved. Fornes thereby greatly influenced the development of Hispanic theatre in the

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[174] M. Elizabeth Osborn, ed., ***On New Ground: Contemporary Hispanic-American Plays*** (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1987), 47.

[175] One time Managing Director of INTAR, and in 1999, Executive Director of the Teatro Municipal de Lima in Lima Peru, Dennis Ferguson-Acosta refers to this workshop as the HPRL (Hispanic Playwrights in Residence Lab) in Delgado and Svich (Ferguson-Acosta), 200-202.

[176] There is no concurrence on the dates of the INTAR lab. Some sources (Delgado and Svich, 298) state its existence and Fornes's pedagogical involvement as 1978-1991, Kent states the above. Clearly there was some overlap as the project underwent changes and revision.

United States and the body of Hispanic dramatic literature that has emerged.

Fornes believed writing does not have to be done in isolation and preferred writing in groups. "That's where I get my writing done. That's why I've been writing so much lately," she said in the 1985 interview with Scott Cummings.[177] Based on this philosophy, she organized the INTAR lab much like an artists' studio and much like her first kitchen-table writing lesson with Sontag. The writers wrote communally as painters paint in a studio setting--in class--as opposed to writers writing at home and bringing the work in for critique as is common in university classes. A grant allowed for a stipend to be paid to each writer and even though Fornes did not exercise the threat, she told the chosen writers that if they were late and the doors shut, they could not get in and would not be paid.

Importance was placed on the physical act of writing rather than talking about writing or critique. In the 1986 interview with David Savran, Fornes said that when the INATR lab writers read their work aloud after the daily writing session, she did not offer criticism. She

[177] Cummings (Clarity), 55.

preferred to see if the writing had its own life or if the writers were writing by someone else's rules.[178]

The atelier environment was arranged like "a Buddhist temple," with much light and beauty to effect meditation and creativity.[179] A physical yoga-type warmup preceded the writing exercises. Fornes explained its purpose to Betsko and Koenig:

> I employ exercises to root the writer into their own organism, their own humanity, rather than the intellect. Writing is an intellectual process, so it is good to root the process into your stomach, your heart, your bowels.[180]

This warmup was often designed to trigger body memory in the visualizations that followed, the body part that triggered the memory, then, to be thought of as a character. Deborah Geis comments on the dramatic result of the interplay between body, memory, and language during the writing process as evident in Fornes's work:

> She recognizes language as a crux of subjectivity, but just as language creates and deploys a body/corpus of words, the body/corpus creates and deploys a "language."[181]

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[178] Savran, 59. Fornes did criticize work written in other workshops, however, which criticism was often swift and cutting. See Chapters Five and Six.

[179] Kent, 151 quoting Besko, 156.

[180] Betsko and Koenig, 162.

[181] Geis, 184-185.

Visualization exercises were key to her method. These drew on the sensory method acting techniques she had learned while taking classes at the Actors Studio but she extended them much further by drawing more deeply on subconscious memory (letter writing or imagining a particular age when you wanted something), pure imagination (games), found objects as words (random phrases),[182] and on her early painting experiences, all of which would be expanded into something else rather than literal representations of the described phenomenon. For me, these exercises often triggered prose, some of which I later harnessed into drama. Her entire method seemed "to reflect the unconventional 'home schooling' provided by her parents."[183]

In 1978, while she was running New York Theatre Strategy and had begun her involvement with INTAR, she began an association with yet another important playwriting entity, the West Coast Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival which, like INTAR and the Hispanic Playwrights Lab

[182] Found objects, literally, were to figure in many of her later plays. Fornes was an obsessive flea-market attendee. The idea for ***The Danube*** came from language records she found, an ironing board inspired ***Mud***, the book Mae reads from in ***Mud*** accidentally created the metaphor. Chance and found objects played a large part in Fornes's play construction which could almost be termed, collage. She indeed, lived her art, for everything she encountered provided fuel for plays.

[183] Kent, 152.

was to be an extremely influential and long-term association, one that lasted nearly seventeen years. A general history and background of this workshop will be the subject of the next chapter. However, it is important to note that the workshop was founded by the prior Vice President of the New York Theatre Strategy and former co-director of Theatre Genesis, fellow playwright and friend of Fornes, whose theatrical aesthetic, like that of Fornes, leaned toward the European but whose theatrical sense was more aural than visual, more akin to poetry and jazz than painting. Mednick is, in fact, a poet who plays music. For fifteen of the seventeen summers of its existence, Fornes taught her workshops to Padua students, a multicultural mix not solely Latina/o as was the INTAR lab, and created short, forty-minute pieces for presentation in outdoor settings which she would later bring back to the East Coast, New York, to hone, shape, and lengthen for the Off-Off Broadway indoor venues. In this way, she was able to work and present continually, the exposure to her plays and her pedagogy became bi-coastal, and she gained a national, near cult-like following with students who became accustomed to being treated as true creators of the theatre.

Fefu was arguably the first site specific play in the United States with scenes performed in rooms at the Relativity Media Lab in New York in 1977 rather than in a single theatrically-designated space. It was the first play she wrote after her fallow period and marked the turning point in her career. Padua, by accident, was to become known for creating site specific work and is now associated with that term. Interestingly, Fornes workshopped *Fefu and Her Friends* at the second Padua Festival in 1979.

Padua was a true *playwrights* workshop, perhaps the only professional one to ever exist. It was not a workshop where playwrights went to be told *how* to do their work, it was a place for them *to* work and to learn all aspects of theatre. At Padua, playwrights were expected to direct their own work or find someone else to do it.[184] Fornes supported this need for playwrights to learn to direct, stating:

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[184] Furthering the similarities between the Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival and The Provincetown Players as mentioned previously, as with Padua, The Provincetown Players' 1916 Constitution and subsequent resolutions were designed to protect the playwrights' work, specifically requiring that each playwright be his or her own director. Eugene O'Neill as the group's most notable rising talent, insisted on naming the New York headquarters of the Provincetown Players The Playwright's Theatre. This focus on the playwright was in direct opposition to the commercialism of Broadway but eventually led disagreement and finally demise. Robert Károly Sarlós, *Jig Cook and the Provincetown Players: Theatre in Ferment* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982) 61-63.

> It is true there is a technique to directing actors, but a playwright can learn to deal with that . . . every playwright needs to. . . . There are many reasons why playwrights, given the opportunity, might not ***want*** to direct: perhaps they don't like dealing with so many people, or they're impatient; maybe they prefer somebody else to do it. If it's the playwright's choice and they prefer not to direct I don't think they have to. But to say they cannot direct! At the Padua Hills Theater Workshop where I go every summer you don't need to ask permission to direct your own play. On the contrary, if you don't want to direct, you have to ***find*** a director. We don't tell people, "You must direct" . . . they just do. It's like making your own sandwich. Because of this, the students see from the start that they can direct their own plays.[185]

Her support of playwrights and belief in their creator birthright knew no bounds:

> The creator is like God in relation to the creation. The playwright has a lot of power, but at the same time, the playwright is very gullible and naïve. I love playwrights, they are like angels really. When they are mistreated, when they are told, "GET OUT!" they go, poor darlings. Playwrights are told they don't know anything about theatre. How can they write a play if they don't know anything about theatre?[186]

Though her extraordinary visual acuity was highly evident in her self-directed productions, she did not give it credit. In the 1985 interview with Scott Cummings he asked, "Do you see any relationship between your painting

[185] Betsko and Koenig, 159.

[186] Ibid.

and your playwriting?"[187] She responded, "No, because my paintings had never really reached a personal depth for me."[188] Her extreme attention to visual detail in her directing, however, belied that denial. Fornes was famous for focusing on detail down to the last fingertip. Actor and director Mary Forcade explains:

> Irene's directing is extremely specific . . . She blocks minutely so that . . . where you go, how you walk, how your head is turned, how your shoulders move, how you sit down, how you move up, is all very, very specific. . . . what the actor is free to do is to find the inner life that would give credence to that movement. . . . [To achieve that effect], she works a lot with imagery. . . . She . . . might use the imagery of walking into a room . . . walking up to a mountain and looking out and not being able to see anything . . . she works a lot with imagery.[189]

Cherríe Moraga noted that while Fornes was directing Moraga's ***Shadow of a Man*** at the Eureka Theatre in San Francisco, she "choreographed" scenes as if "each were a moving painting."[190]

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[187] Cummings (Clarity), 51.

[188] Ibid., 52.

[189] Mala Renganathan, interview with Mary Forcade, 1996, http://www.mariairenefornes.com/Directing/actors.html, website accessed 19 September 2005.

[190] Delgado and Svich, 185.

In an interview held on December 2, 2004 via teleconference with Leslie Katz's dramaturgy class at the University of Toronto she was asked by the class if her experience as an abstract painter influenced her work. She responded:

> I have a friend who reminded me that I had been working as a painter with Hans Hofmann . . . and it was so extraordinary how he would throw some color on one end of the canvas and make another color like a green, and brush it very quickly on a diagonal, and he would create what he would call . . . a "push-and-pull" . . . [which] has to do with the enmity of color shape, the intensity of color, the tone of the color next to another color, according to the shape of the color, too. And those enmities . . . were what painting was about . . . that was what influenced me in playwriting more than it influenced me in the painting, because it could more easily be applied to playwriting than to painting.[191]

In a 1990 interview with ***Contemporary Authors***, she responded similarly to a comparable question concerning her painting background:

> . . . Hans Hofmann always talked about push-and-pull, as he called it: the dynamics created between colors when you place one color very close to another or anywhere else in the canvas. It was push-and-pull sideways but also in terms of depth: a color could go inside the canvas and the other colors would come out. The color and shape of the form would create this tension, and he always spoke of that almost as if it were the main thing that guided his work and his teaching.

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[191] Ibid.

> I realized only recently that that had had a very strong impact on my playwriting, because I compose my plays guided not by story line but more by energies that take place within each scene, and also the energies that take place between one scene and the scene that follows. It's like Hofmann's push-and-pull in that the narrative doesn't control how the play proceeds, but the development of the energies within the play.[192]

Because of her painting background and work as a textile designer, Fornes's visual acuity and sensitivity to form and composition do seem to have a direct influence on her theatre productions. Her work has been compared to that of painters by various artists and critics: Frida Kahlo (Elinor Fuchs), Phillip Pearlstein (Paul Berman), Vermeer (Erika Munk), Zurbarán and Juan Sanchez Cotán (Marc Robinson), Edward Hopper (Fornes herself).[193]

The arc of Fornes's distinct and increasing distillation of language (often ascribed to the fact that she did not write in her native tongue),[194] clearly

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[192] Hal May and James G. Lesniak, eds., "Fornes, Maria Irene" in ***Contemporary Authors*** New Revision Series, 28 (Detroit: Gale Research Inc., 1990), 178.

[193] Robinson, 3.

[194] Bonnie Marranca states: "Fornes has always had a commonsense approach to drama that situates itself in the utter simplicity of her dialogue. She writes sentences, not paragraphs. Her language is a model of direct address, it has the modesty of a writer for whom English is a learned language." Bonnie Marranca, "The Economy of Tenderness," in Robinson, 49; originally published in ***Performing Arts Journal*** 22, vol. 8, no. 1 (1984).

displayed in the Pulitzer-nominated ***What of the Night***, recalls the arc of painter Henri Matisse's career as evidenced in the 1992 retrospective of his work. Matisse, like most serious painters, began by painting detailed realism. As his skills developed, he experimented with form and color, culminating, at the end of his career, in extreme simplicity--pure color, form, composition. The arc Fornes's directing career, however, demonstrates the opposite trend--an increasing attention to minutiae comparable to, in painting, trompe l'oeil, or in film, hyper-realism. Both Fornes's writing and directing were influenced by her ability to collage--her writing by the use of disconnected words and phrases, her directing by the use of flea-market or found objects. Though opposing arcs, both, in concert demonstrated extraordinary artistic composition and control.

Most important, Fornes has been called an artist of almost "pure imagination" by critic Richard Gilman:

> . . . Miss Fornés is a dramatist of almost pure imagination (as pure as imagination can be in an age of mixed media and life styles contending with those of art) whose interest in writing plays has little to do with making reports on what she's observed, in parodying society or behavior, or in "dramatizing" what already exists in the forms of ordinary emotion or experience. But if this is a simple thing to say about her, it isn't any less important, because there are

> exceedingly few playwrights, particularly in America, of whom it can be said. Our genuine avant-garde is for the most part heavily implicated in the uses of the stage for therapy or social action, while our surrogate avant-garde goes on turning out its little "human" playlets about people who can't communicate, and so on.[195]

Fornes's work reflecting her creative imagination continued throughout the decades. In a 1986 interview, Fornes addressed her use of imagination in writing directly:

> Plays are limited by using real people as character models. When you are writing purely from imagination, you let the characters move and behave as ***they*** want; they find their own parameters, their own lives.
>
> When you deal with situations you have witnessed or experienced, you know exactly what happened. If you decide that actuality doesn't work for the play and something has to be changed, what do you follow? When you follow the characters in your imagination there is not one truth but a number of possibilities, all of which are true.
>
> The character that is completely imagined comes out of myself. Every character I imagine is part of me. I'm not embarrassed to put myself onstage. The sadistic captain in ***The Conduct of Life***, and the victim of that sadistic captain--you can't ***write*** them unless you ***are*** them. If a character is brutal, it is because I am brutal. I take the blame and the credit. No writer can write a character unless she understands it thoroughly inside herself.[196]

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[195] Richard Gilman, "Introduction," in ***The Winter Repertory 2: María Irene Fornés Promenade & Other Plays***, ed. Michael Feingold (New York: Winter House Ltd., 1971), 1-2.

[196] Maria Irene Fornes in ***Creating Theater: The Professionals' Approach to New Plays***, ed. Lee Alan Morrow and Frank Pike (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), 16.

This "pure imagination" approach is none the more remarkable considering the many-decades long interest in social realism and newspaper drama that prevailed during most of her career. Consider the following memory observation by critic Ruby Cohn:

> 1977 or 1978--My memory is hazy for the context of two dominant impressions of Irene at TNT [The New Theatre], but the impressions are vivid. Janitorial help was scarce on the campus where TNT took place, and early one morning I walked into a refuse-strewn room to find Irene busy with a broom. A little later she might have wished for a metaphoric broom to sweep away the antagonisms between those who advocated "pure" theater and those who insisted on a social purpose for theater. As tempers flared, I can see Irene's pained face: "This is a ***terribly*** unfortunate thing to happen." I wish I could report a happy ending, but TNT died soon afterward.[197]

It is unfortunate, but this split between imaginative playwriting and realistic playwriting seemed to privilege one over the other in the following decades.

It wouldn't be until ***Fefu and Her Friends*** and subsequent plays that Fornes's political-social stance was acknowledged but even then, despite Sontag's inclusions,

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[197] Ruby Cohen, "A Fornes Calendar," in C***onducting*** a Life: Reflections on the Theatre of Maria Irene Fornes, ed. Maria M. Delgado and Caridad Svich (Lyme, New Hampshire: Smith and Kraus, Inc., 1999), 9.

Fornes herself resisted party line affiliations and, perhaps in the most political stance of all, insisted on being recognized simply as artist. During the feminist wars of the 1970s, 80s, and even into the 1990s, a certain censorship was applied to female writers which if not adhered to, resulted in either banishment or disgrace. Female characters were considered role models and therefore had to be strong, feminist. To depict anything less was considered furthering stereotype. Fornes confounded critics by her clear portrayal of the female condition without giving into party line pressure. Her insistence on art, imagination, and creativity first was nowhere more clearly expressed than at the Second International Women Playwrights' Conference held in Toronto in 1991, the title of which was "Voices of Authority." At a time when multiculturalism was just beginning to fly rampant with the feminist movement not yet embracing issues of class and race, this title spurred warring factions. As the questions concerning these issues rose, so did the argument for imagination:

> A few women argued convincingly against curbing the imagination for any political line. "Respectfulness is crippling," San Francisco performance artist Terry Baum said, adding that women have already been censored enough, and shouldn't limit themselves by what is politically

> correct. Maria Irene Fornes went so far as to call for the evasive humanist "standard of excellence" as a way to judge work. When the audience booed, Fornes retaliated by shouting, "My work is as political as anybody's!"[198]

The political war regarding female writers has never been fully resolved. The censorship turned in on itself, silencing voices that should be heard. Fornes, however, remains the premier torch-bearer for women writers of the imagination.

Fornes had a common sense approach to theatre and to writing. Her simple, distilled language is often attributed to the fact that she wrote in her second language. Her insistence on not being categorized confounded many critics, many of whom could not seem to come to terms with her directness and her simplicity, confusing it with simple-mindedness yet knowing that designation was certainly incorrect.

According to Kent, Fornes's often bold statements at conferences such as the 1991 Second International Women Playwrights Conference mentioned above and in interviews are often deemed "simplistic or anti-theoretical"[199] which

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[198] Rachel B. Shteir, "Women and Authority: Issues Elude Conferees: How a Meeting with Visionary Goals Missed the Boat," *American Theatre* (September 1991): 54.

[199] Kent, 32.

contradicts the subtlety of her artistic expression. Kent, however, believes she made such statements "in order to question notions that underlie an assumed consensus . . . and to re-direct a group's attention to neglected problems."[200]

Anti-intellectual, coquettish or almost childish at times, Fornes intentionally aspired to confound critics. Her proclivity for changing styles[201] irritated critics as they were unable to pin her down but also pointed to an underlying Padua-held belief that each play has its own shape.[202] Fornes's stylistic experimentation done without regard to critics, proved costly.

> I realized that what makes my plays unacceptable to people is the form more than the content. My content is usually not outrageous. . . . What makes people vicious must be the form.[203]

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[200] Ibid.

[201] "She feels that she changes styles daily--'it's the only thing that keeps me alive!' Fornes is not given to hyperbole . . . so it's worth trying to figure out what she means by such a seemingly exaggerated claim." Wetzsteon, 34.

[202] Murray Mednick, unpublished ongoing discussion with students, circa 1998-1999, 3. "And it is a fact that no two original plays, i.e., plays of artistic merit, are structurally the same. Structures are organic and unique. One of the pleasures of playwriting is the discovery of the structure of a piece, its bones."

[203] May and Lesniak, ***Contemporary Authors New Revision Series***, Volume 28, 176, quoting Betsko and Koenig. Further quoting Sontag from her preface to ***Maria Irene Fornes: Plays,*** 8: ". . . unlike similarly influenced New York dramatists, her work did not eventually become parasitic on literature (or opera, or movies). It was never a revolt against theatre, or a theatre recycling fantasies encoded in other genres. . . . Fornes is neither literary nor anti-literary. These are

Conclusion

Fornes's respect for writing and writers and belief in pedagogical responsibility was underlined during a private dinner conversation at a 1996 panel discussion at the Wilma Theatre in Philadelphia with Tony Kushner. Kushner reports her asking in a "kind of appalled fascination, her high-pitched voice rising higher and higher . . . "'Did you really tell your students to write arrogantly and pretentiously?'"[204] (Kushner and Fornes both taught at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts Dramatic Writing Program.) Kushner admitted that he did, that he wanted his students to "stop being timid, careful, neat, and politic."[205] Kushner realized his pedagogical method was "utterly dissonant"[206] from that of Fornes: "Learn humility before your subject, lose rather than aggrandize the Self."[207] Kushner continues by acknowledging her

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not cerebral exercises or puzzles but the real questions. . ." May and Lesniak, ***Contemporary Authors***, 176, quoting Sontag in "Preface," ***Maria Irene Fornes Plays***, 8.

[204] Tony Kushner, "Some Thoughts about Maria Irene Fornes," in Robinson, 131.

[205] Ibid.

[206] Ibid.

[207] Ibid.

pedagogical presence as paramount, her impact on generations of American playwrights "greater by far than any other important American playwright, the only one who can list pedagogy as a primary accomplishment."[208]

A true champion of the playwright, creativity, and imagination, Fornes, even in her unplanned retirement, continues to wield influence. Her exercises, her words, and her ability to unleash individual creativity continue to resonate with her disciples. She told Savran in 1988:

> I have invented exercises that are very effective and very profound. They take you to the place where creativity is, where personal experience and personal knowledge are used. But it's not about your personal experience. Personal experience feeds into that creative place. It's wonderful to see that people can learn how to write.[209]

And Delgado in 1999:

> You don't teach an art by giving a person a bunch of rules. You teach it by encouraging the person to pay attention to their own imagination. To trust and respect their imagination. To allow the work to be a meditation. To open their imagination and their sensitivity to the themes and aspects of human character that interest them. To trust their imagination in the most intimate and delicate way. To commit themselves to the integrity of the work. Not to drive the very work out of their hands by burdening it with external concerns. Those are the main things

[208] Ibid.

[209] Savran, 58.

> that people have to learn. You can teach a person how to breathe, how to meditate, how to listen to their own consciousness, even how to listen to their own desires. Why wouldn't you be able to teach a person how to find their own creativity?[210]

Fornes proved in her classes that creativity as a self-reflective activity, the "I" of the "eye" as Ellis discusses in ***The Ethnographic Eye***,[211] can be taught, but only by the most rigorously honest methods.

As Kushner stated, Fornes had no pedagogical peer. She did, however, train many others who will carry on her pedagogical legacy. And as a dedicated teacher, she single-handedly created a body of Hispanic-American dramatic literature that has reinvigorated contemporary theatre and added luster to the canon. The wonder is that Fornes never won a Pulitzer (though she was short-listed for ***What of the Night***) nor received a MacArthur Genius grant, current trend to give to relative unknowns in early-mid career notwithstanding. Her stubborn individualism and strict adherence to her own artistic standards likely kept her out of the running. Fortunately, for future

[210] Delgado and Svich, 270.

[211] Ellis.

generations of theatre artists, her legacy continues through her students.

For this playwright, Maria Irene Fornes will always be the "eyes" of the stage, and, as I demonstrate in the next chapter, Murray Mednick is its "ears."

CHAPTER THREE:
THE PADUA HILLS PLAYWRIGHTS WORKSHOP AND FESTIVAL AND FOUNDER, MURRAY MEDNICK

> Listen to me...this story is about listening... Mr. Coyote don't know how to listen...he got no sense...Mr. Coyote has to die first, before he can learn how to listen...Old Nana will teach Coyote how to listen with his whole body....
>
> — Murray Mednick, Spider Woman in *Coyote V: Listening to Old Nana*[212]

The Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival was, arguably, the most important playwriting workshop to emerge in the second half of the twentieth century. While some have termed it a happenstance extension of the Off-Off Broadway movement, it was, in fact, unique.[213] Created for

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[212] Murray Mednick, "Coyote V: Listening to Old Nana" in ***Plays from Padua Hills 1982***, ed. Murray Mednick (Claremont, California: The Pomona College Theater Department, 1983), 98. Note: Ellipses in quote are as per original and do not indicate omission.

[213] Stephen Bottoms in ***Playing Underground*** does not literally come out and say Padua was an extension of Off-Off Broadway but he does note that "many of Padua's key personnel were directly transplanted from . . . Theatre Genesis," one of the four original Off-Off Broadway venues, and quotes Mednick as saying, "In many ways, Padua was a furthering . . . and even a fulfillment of what began at Genesis." Bottoms, 355. Referencing the entity that emerged from the Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival, the unauthored postscript to ***Plays For A New Millenium: New Work From Padua*** edited by Guy Zimmerman states, "Padua Playwrights is a theater company devoted to extending and deepening the influence of New York's Off-Off Broadway movement in the 1960s." Guy Zimmerman, ed., ***Plays for a New Millennium: New Work From Padua*** (New York: Padua Hills Press, 2006), 518. The unpublished dialogue between Mednick and students, the student identified as W.G. responding to student G.Z.'s comment concerning Padua's workshops and process and focus on writing as process states, "Historically, the tradition of 'workshopping,' began with Off-Off Broadway." Murray

playwrights by a playwright, self-contained, and complete with its own idealistic accord of privileging playwrights above all other theatre craftspersons, Padua survived despite ever-escalating animosity towards, and desire to control, the theatre writer. Its uniqueness in time, place, and ideology deserves further scholarly research as repercussions of excessive control of playwriting are only now being felt with more and more playwrights grumbling about never-ending "script development." The hierarchical-pyramid structure of this scheme termed "script development" has more relevance to screen and television writing than theatre but for the fact that playwrights, buying into the old axiom, "there is no money in theatre," often opt to pay for these development services rather than

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Mednick, ***Unpublished Ongoing Discussion With Students***, circa 1998-1999, received via E-Mail 27 August 2007, 2. Because there is virtually no critical writing concerning the Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival, the inference is made through noting Mednick's unplanned migration from Off-Off Broadway to the Los Angeles area and subsequent desire to "re-create the ambience he had known in New York." Jan Breslauer, "A Mecca is Born," ***Los Angeles Times***, 17 July 1994, Calendar, 8. Padua was not created intentionally. Had Mednick not moved to the West Coast, albeit reluctantly, had he not accidentally met Woodruff who suggested the idea initially, Padua would never have happened. Many aspects contribute to its uniqueness not least of which is location--a major experimental theatre lab taking place in the Los Angeles hills far away from the major theatre centers of the country is daring and could be considered foolish. Mednick himself notes the difference in Padua and Off-Off Broadway with a nod to the inimitable 1960s decade in the Breslauer article, "I don't think it's analogous to what I felt in New York, but New York was special then. The tradition of inviting people, as opposed to having a kind of script contest, has evolved from that. We have created a community here and had an influence on the theater community as a whole." Ibid.

be paid--a most ingenious capitalistic venture if there ever was one.

While Padua was certainly rooted in and emerged from the Off-Off Broadway movement, its characteristics point to a far more holistic playwriting focus. With its inherent isolation--a locale in suburban Los Angeles, a far lesser visibility than the theatres of New York City tucked instead within a highly commercialized film industry--and with far fewer involved even after its near twenty years of existence, its flavor and passion was singular rather than eclectic, pedagogically rather than artistically focused, experimental and process-oriented, never evolving or wishing to evolve to the commercialism that inevitably infected Off-Off Broadway. That Padua had its roots in the initial vision of Off-Off Broadway and breathed life into that initial vision for an additional twenty years cannot be denied. But beyond that vision, Padua had a distinct existence of its own.

From 1978 through 1995, Padua managed to stay alive fifteen of those eighteen years in a hostile arts climate, subsisting on funding scraped from the tight purses of grants organizations structured mainly for social service outreach and topical multicultural realism with little

interest or regard for artists who resisted categorization and preferred creating from the subconscious depths of the creative imagination.

The Reagan era, combined with dense neo-liberal backlash, made it difficult to beget work without some form of censorship, right or left, stepping in to squelch aberrant creativity. Female playwrights, for instance, were expected to concoct Amazonion characters with soaring feminist ideals inhabiting and conquering hostile worlds, or be ignored.[214] Male playwrights were, rightly or wrongly, under scrutiny for misogynistic tendencies. Both sexes were required to be hyperaware of culture, gender, political issues, and place that awareness ahead of personal vision. In other words, playwrights were expected to create role models and to show a world as it should be, not as it was, and certainly not as the playwright/artist saw and/or experienced it. Rather than trusting the playwright/artist to take the pulse of society and reflect

[214] ". . . a major goal of our theatre is to create new images of women in theatre . . .," Judith Katz, Literary Manager, At the Foot of the Mountain, a non-profit women's theatre "of protest, celebration, and hope," commented in a rejection letter addressed to me dated 16 September 1983. My submission was titled, ***Eat***, and though there were and still are no characters of color in the full-length play, the responders, apparently having misread or not read the play at all, objected to my portrayal of the Black women. I was confused about this but eventually realized the female character in the play ate too much while railing against her husband--not an appropriate role model. I am still baffled how that character became "Black" in the reader's eyes except, perhaps, as a subversion of personal unconscious prejudice.

his or her deep vision in the art, the playwright/artist became a puppet of outside forces, and to get produced, often succumbed to these forces. All art was deemed political whether or not the artist so intended.

While this state of affairs was likely important for the era, even perhaps necessary and well-meaning for the purpose of facilitating change, it had an unfortunate censoring effect for those artists who wanted to examine and speak of their own truth. Truth came pre-defined. Anything deviating from that truth was discarded.

In this climate, Padua was, for playwrights, a Shangri-La. Not a factory for mass producing a preset product, Padua insisted on studying the old masters--the Greeks and Shakespeare--and each artist/student delving into his or her own personal Truth with a capital "T" to discover individual voice. Attention to Truth and the large philosophical questions such as What is Man? What is Death? What is Life? was demanding and difficult. Intellect and honesty went hand-in-hand. Straying resulted in frustration, tears. Padua was a place not sensitive to feelings but focused on art and its creation.

The workshop structure and facilitation resembled that of the European atelier. Several veteran playwrights, the

masters, were invited to develop (and often write from scratch), direct, rehearse, and present their work at outdoor locations. These playwrights were required to teach several classes, attend and critique student readings and to allow students, their apprentices, to assist them throughout the process. This apprenticeship approach was completely unique. Students learned how to become whole playwrights, not amputees, capable of seeing their vision all the way through to completion. In addition, they learned how whole playwrights talked critically about work and how they exchanged ideas at the weekly student readings.

Key, too, was the communal aspect. At its height, students, actors, artists, and staff lived and ate mostly together for seven weeks. This created "company" but not in the current connotation of the word when used theatrically. "Family" might be a better qualifier as a certain aesthetic evolved from this living-together closeness--akin to a relatedness rooted in the singular but monumental goal of mounting each festival. Lifelong friendships were forged amidst the burgeoning respect for each other's abilities. Yet, all was underpinned by a

healthy competition that did not completely erase the drive for individual success.

This "whole" playwright approach was, and still predominantly is, unheard of in the other large playwright development venues which treat the playwright as wordsmith specialist, or as Theresa Rebeck termed it in the March/April 2008 issue of ***The Dramatist***, "text designer."[215] Severed from his or her own work, this truncated playwright is incapable, really, of executing personal vision or exhibiting artistic thought except, perhaps, in strict form on the page. And even the script is subject to debate, squabble, and ultimate excision if the playwright strays too far into the domain of the visual specialists--i.e., directors and designers--by writing lengthy stage directions. A savvy few find ways to escape the script police by incorporating essential visual effects into dialogue, thereby preserving original intent.

A Brief History

The Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival owes its existence to Murray Mednick; it, in fact, ***was*** Murray

[215] Daniel Goldfarb, "Roundtable on Writing for Television: The Playwright and TV: Lightning in a Bottle" ***The Dramatist***, March/April 2008, 25.

Mednick. It is helpful to recap Mednick's origins to better understand the emergence and location of Padua.

Murray Mednick was born in 1939, the oldest of six children.[216] The Mednick family lived in Brooklyn, New York until 1945 when Murray[217] was about to enter the first grade at which time they relocated to the Catskills. Severe poverty greatly affected the family dynamic. Young Murray experimented with and became addicted to drugs. A number of his plays, including the award-winning *The Hawk,* address his drug experiences directly. The upside of this unfortunate saga is that Murray managed to kick all of his addictions and is rightly proud of this feat. It took him eighteen months, but by the spring of 1975 he was clean, and well before the time he inaugurated Padua, he was completely free from all drug use.

Sensational or even trivial for a scholarly work as this information may seem, it is an important marker in

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[216] Christine Nasso, ed., "Murray Mednick," in *Contemporary Authors*, First Revision, 21-24, (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1977), 595. Unless otherwise noted, all detailed information is from extensive interviews and E-Mails with Murray Mednick over the course of several months in 2007.

[217] I will henceforth use the names Murray Mednick, Murray, and Mednick as follows: In those biographical passages in which identifying him solely by his last name would unnecessarily confuse him with other members of his family, I will use his first name Murray. I will also use the name Murray when quoting interviewees and when describing any autoethnographic experience. In scholarly sections I will use his last name Mednick or his full name Murray Mednick if appropriate.

time, for the 1960s movements, including that of Off-Off Broadway, were very much underscored by experimentation with and the allure of substance abuse. Survival in the era as well as artistic growth and maturity depended on surviving and surpassing that culture while still embracing it, which Mednick certainly accomplished. That he became a leading figure in theatre and the Off-Off Broadway movement generally and went on to spearhead his own organization, is testament to his determination, discipline, genius, and talent.

Mednick owes allegiance to Ralph Cook, his savior and mentor. Ralph Cook was the founder of Theatre Genesis, located at the historic St. Mark's in the Bowery, an Episcopal Church on the corner of Second Avenue and East Tenth Street, and one of the big four cornerstone venues of the Off-Off Broadway theatre movement, the others recognized as Caffe Cino, Judson Poets' Theater, and La Mama. Cook functioned as a mentor/father figure to those playwrights he nurtured, much as Ellen Stewart was "la mama."[218] The Reverend Michael Allen, determined to minister to the community, established various social

[218] Bottoms, 105.

programs emphasizing the "needy and disenfranchised"[219] and asked Cook, who was working at the Village Gate nightclub as a headwaiter, to run an acting workshop and start a theatre program for local youths. Sam Shepard (who was to become Theatre Genesis's poster playwright) was working at the same nightclub as a busboy. Theatre Genesis's first production of the young Sam Shepard's ***The Rock Garden*** was staffed almost entirely by Cook's associates at the Village Gate, many of whom made appearances much later on the opposite coast at Padua. Cook's legendary hands-off approach to directing endeared him to the playwrights, allowing them to see their original new work without overlaying directorial matrix.

Mednick, a poet hanging out in the Lower East Side poetry scene who had attended Brooklyn College, was not yet a playwright when he first attended Theatre Genesis. He was first attracted to the venue for its production of beat poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti's play, ***The Customs Collector in Baggy Pants*** on a double bill with Shepard's ***Chicago.*** The productions inspired him to write his first play, ***The Box***, which was produced in December 1965, directed by Lee Kissman, who later became a frequent participant in Padua

[219] Ibid., 107.

festivals. Minimalist set and props with an emphasis on found objects inspired by "an awareness of the way that everyday objects can become strangely fascinating,"[220] often with one visually anchoring image juxtaposed against language-driven dialogue, were necessary for the small space, and heralded a similar iconic usage in the later Padua plays. All of the Off-Off Broadway venues operated under a sense of freedom which meant, too, that props and set and all of the costly accoutrements of professional theatre were of necessity, found, free, or donated.

The difference between Theatre Genesis and the other three venues was that it was predominately testosterone-driven, that is, comprised of straight males, often with drug problems. It was, in fact, a boys' club--only two plays by women (Sally Ordway and Shirley Guy) were produced in the entire 1960s decade.[221] According to Maria Irene Fornes, the work at Theatre Genesis, while certainly male-driven:

> . . . was not macho in the usual way but something very kind of ***defeated***--not macho-macho but macho drug, which is different. These were straight men but from the street drug world.

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[220] Ibid., Bottoms quoting Mednick, 112.

[221] Ibid., 120.

> Macho drug has this kind of undercurrent of anger, disappointment, possible violence.[222]

This observation was in line with the church's mission of outreach to the disenfranchised of the area and is clearly observed in the fact that many of its writers came from poor, blue-collar backgrounds. Its free ticket policy attracted the local community that often consisted of a heavy street element. Upon meeting Cook, Mednick, who certainly fit the targeted profile, was attracted to Theatre Genesis for its dedication to the writer. He explained:

> I responded very well to Ralph Cook as a kid because he was always interested in the theatre as a holy act, and that there was something within the whole procedure, from writing to performing, that could touch real meaning. It's the silence in the listening. There is a terror there, as well as something eternal, and awakening, which is the whole point of course. "Something happens," Ralph used to say. . . . There is another kind of architecture that is nonlinear, based more on poetic themes and correspondences, and so on. Modern, you could say. But if it doesn't break the horizontal plane . . . [it's] a kind of pseudo art--nothing in it but clever talk. . . . I was strictly at Genesis and very loyal to Ralph.[223]

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[222] Ibid., Bottoms quoting Fornes, 120.

[223] Murray Mednick, E-Mail to Andréa J. Onstad, Subject: ***Padua Continued***, 26 August 2007.

Mednick's allegiance to the venue and to Ralph Cook helped shape his theatrical aesthetic and provided the practical experience so necessary yet so often lacking for playwrights. Mednick described its importance in an August 2007 E-Mail:

> Theatre Genesis was very important . . . largely due to Ralph Cook, who was the artistic director there (lay minister to the arts as well, for the church), who made a place to work for me and others, like Sam and Walter Hadler, because of a respect and care he had for the work of poets and the possibility for a kind of revelation in the act of making theater. Something in a real play that had a certain verticality, or, in Aristotle's terminology, catharsis. It also connected us to theater being a literary act, even a linguistic one, brought to life by the actors and the director by their discovery in the text. Genesis was special in its attitude toward text and the valuation of the playwright. It was also where I learned about workshopping--we had to do a lot of that to survive--and the difficulties of choosing plays and people and casting and all the rest of it.[224]

The Hawk, a communally developed Theatre Genesis project using Artaudian[225] methods, became Genesis's most

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[224] Murray Mednick, E-Mail to Andréa J. Onstad, Subject: ***Padua Continued***, 14 August 2007.

[225] Although Antonin Artaud's ***The Theater and Its Double*** was first published in 1938, his ideas of the confrontational, reality-shattering, epiphanal aspects of theatre for both audience and actors contained therein were never more fully explored than in the decade of the 1960s and, in my opinion, finally fully realized in rock concerts. ***The Theater and Its Double*** is perhaps the earliest autoethnography written by a theatre practitioner. In it, Artaud describes his thoughts about theatre as they relate to his experiences as he travels from France to Mexico and finally to an insane asylum.

important work. A two-month retreat at a Pennsylvanian farm during the summer of 1967, headed by Mednick and Tony Barsha who also directed, resulted in an "anti-***Hair***"[226] portrayal of the counterculture's darker underside. Critic Ruby Cohn called it "one of the single most remarkable downtown performances created during the period."[227] It was revived for Off Broadway one month after the opening of ***Hair*** but closed after only fifteen performances. Audiences did not know what to make of it and in contrast to the highly commercial and co-opted ***Hair***, it seemed "too cool, too cruel,"[228] in comparison. Nevertheless, it introduced a workshop, improvisational, communal aspect to developing work that Mednick was to later hone.

As the 1960s matured, violence escalated. What began as a peace movement disintegrated at the close of the decade, May 4, 1970, to the ultimate end of the effective counter-culture--the Kent State killings. ***The Deer Kill***, one of Mednick's Obie award-winning plays and a heralding of the growing dysfunctionality of the counter-culture, opened just four days before the Kent State killings. Just

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[226] Bottoms, 244.

[227] Ibid., 248.

[228] Ibid., 249.

as Kent State epitomized the final fragmentation ending an era, ***The Deer Kill*** opening, penultimate to Kent State, ushered in the demise of Theatre Genesis as well as several of the other Off-Off Broadway venues.

No one agrees on the reason Ralph Cook quit Theatre Genesis. The fact simply remains that he left and moved to California, far away from the alternative theatre scene. Mednick, Sam Shepard, and Walter Hadler, Cook's favorite sons, took over collective leadership but soon fell to squabbling. Shepard left in 1971, moving to London to get off drugs. Michael Smith, chief theatre critic for the ***Village Voice*** throughout the 1960s, openly gay, and a playwright and director in his own right, replaced him, obliterating the Genesis straight-male-only profile. Gay and female writers' work, including that of Maria Irene Fornes, was presented. Mednick left Genesis in 1973 and, like Cook, headed for California. Smith left in 1974, leaving only Walter Hadler in command.

During the 1970s, Theatre Genesis continued its "commitment to idiosyncratic social commentary"[229] keeping its free ticket policy and continuing its lackadaisical marketing methods--i.e., not advertising beyond its

[229] Ibid., 346-350.

surrounding neighborhood--a feature recognizable in the Padua archives. When the church was damaged in a fire in 1978, the theatre program was discontinued, thus marking the end of Theatre Genesis. With its demise along with that of the other cornerstone venues, Off-Off Broadway as a movement came to an end.

Meanwhile, after splitting from his theatrical roots, Mednick did not go willingly to California. His was a more serendipitous journey. Mednick's last play at Theatre Genesis, *Are You Lookin'?,* was a semi-autobiographical examination of his own drug addiction and the disintegration facing the counter-culture at the time. Shortly after this production, Mednick left for Mexico, financed by a Guggenheim award. Drawn to the Mayan and Zapotec Indian traditions there and intent on following the Red Road, he spent five months in the Yucatan.

Upon his return, he discovered he and his girlfriend[230] had been evicted from their Brooklyn apartment. They left again, this time to Nova Scotia to live on a friend's farm. His girlfriend's grandmother died about this time. Her family needed someone to live in the grandmother's house which was located in LaVerne, California on Bonita Avenue

[230] Mednick did not provide the name of his girlfriend. I assumed he preferred her anonymity and did not press for particulars.

right across from a park. LaVerne is situated in eastern Los Angeles County, at the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains. Unless the Santa Ana winds are blowing, the mountains cannot be seen for the smog. This visibility condition was as true then, in the mid-1970s, as it is now and as it has been long before the first settlers came to the area. That the famous Los Angeles smog is due solely to automobile exhaust is myth. The entire Los Angeles basin is prone to a natural inversion factor, though automobiles certainly contribute to the problem. In any case, LaVerne University, a Christian Brothers school, was only a few blocks from the Bonita Avenue house.

After moving and settling into the new surroundings, Mednick sent out numerous inquiries to theatre departments of various schools hoping to get a teaching job. He received two responses. One was from the University of California Long Beach and the other from LaVerne University. At this point, Mednick's serendipitous theatrical journey merges with that of Padua--both blending into one providential fate.

To better visualize the context in which Mednick found himself transplanted and to highlight the origin of the

festival/workshop's appropriated name, the following is a brief history of the location called Padua.

Padua, not to be confused with Padua, Italy, of ***Taming of the Shrew*** fame, was--and is--a compound called Padua Hills, situated in the hills above Claremont, a town neighboring LaVerne, and the cultural center of Pomona Valley. With a view of staggering beauty, surrounded by mountains and housed in Spanish Colonial buildings, the Padua Hills Theatre Complex, home of the Mexican Players, represented a distinctive twentieth century architectural trend with its theatre, restaurant, and studio residence grouped around a central courtyard.

In 1928, while the Little Theatre Movement was still strong, Howard H. Garner and a group of other arts-conscious Claremont residents formed a corporation to manage acreage in the neighboring foothills so as to control development. The plan was to build an arts community. This plan was realized by 1930. Though the theatre first presented traditional European and American productions, by 1935 it became the home of the Mexican Players. At this time, Garner created the Padua Institute, the purpose of which was to foster "positive relations

between Americans and Mexican Americans."[231] Many artisans were attracted to the area and in 1973, one year before the theatre closed due to the gas shortage,[232] Governor Ronald Reagan honored it for its unique service "in preserving and presenting the musical and dramatic arts of Mexico, which underlies California's cultural heritage."[233] In 1998, the theatre was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. During the wild fires of 2003, it was nearly destroyed. The complex is now rented out for weddings and special events.[234]

Little research has been done concerning Padua Hills Theatre and the Mexican Players. According to Matt García, this longest-running Mexican American theatre in United States history has been overlooked by Chicano theatre scholars who address its existence only by unfairly comparing it to such political activist entities as Teatro Campesino. Because it was founded by non-Mexicans, García

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[231] Padua Hills Theatre, http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/feature/hispanic/2000/padua.HTM, internet, accessed 23 November 2007.

[232] Susan La Tempa, "About the Padua Hills Playwrights' Workshop and Festival," in ***Plays from Padua Hills 1982,*** ed. Murray Mednick (Pomona College: Claremont, California, 1983), 166.

[233] Ibid.

[234] Padua Hills Theatre--The Mexican Players Home page, available from http://loscalifornios.org, internet, accessed 23 November 2007.

notes that often the Garners patronized the Paduanos and insinuates the Paduanos may have compromised their culture by not exercising autonomy over their productions. Nevertheless, the group did help shape intercultural relations and during its existence "spawned perhaps the first generation of Mexican American film actors and radio performers."[235]

In any case, this rich legacy was the one into which Murray Mednick, with his own extensive Off-Off Broadway background, fell in 1978. By his own admission, he would have never left New York had circumstances and fate not dictated the move west:

> I would have never left New York if it weren't for the accidents of life and for years in Southern California I was in culture shock for sure. All Okies and orange trees and no Jews. I missed the city and the theatre scene, but Genesis had seen its day.[236]

Nevertheless, he found a way to transplant his ideas into very fertile soil.

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[235] Matt García, "Adjusting the Focus: Padua Hills Theatre and Latino History," available from http://www.oah.org/pubs/magazine/latinos/garcia.html, internet, accessed 23 November 2007; reprint from ***Organization of American Historiams: Magazine of History*** 10 (Winter 1996).

[236] Mednick E-Mail, 14 August 2007.

In 1974, Mednick began teaching part-time at both the University of California Long Beach and LaVerne University. The Padua connection was a mere four years away. Mednick described the emergence of Padua as well as the first stages of the Workshop/Festival in a 13 August 2007 E-Mail:

> The head of the department at LaVerne was a man named John R. Woodruff who was in semi-retirement at LaVerne (had formerly been at Tufts University or some place like that). He had heard of me and came knocking on my door one day and I started teaching there. In the Fall of 1977, Mr. Woodruff brought me to a compound in the hills above Claremont called Padua Hills. The place was famous for its theatrical tradition but was used mainly for weddings now. There was a theatre there, which could not be used because of fire laws, but there was a beautiful dining room we could use for classes, lots of outbuildings and patios and orchards, etc. A gorgeous spot up there in the hills. Woodruff had this idea that given my background, I ought to invite some friends for a workshop at this place. That we should invite paying students, and so on. He offered a budget of eleven thousand dollars and said I could invite whoever I wanted and do whatever I wanted--I would be artistic director--we just couldn't perform for the public inside the theater or in any of the other buildings. I think I invited Sam Shepard, and Irene and a couple of other people. Irene stayed at my house. John Steppling was a special (non-paying) student that year. We managed to attract students from around the country and the Los Angeles area. The students stayed at LaVerne but we did as much as we could communally, with formal dinners and clean-up just about every day. One of my exercises had to do with "listening to the space." The spaces were so interesting around the facility that it lended itself to that sort of thing. It was essentially a listening exercise which is always good. Anyway, the

> spaces were so interesting around there that some of us, including me and Irene and Sam and John Steppling decided to make plays for the certain individual spaces (I used the olive grove for the first Coyote play, ***Pointing***), and so we had a bunch of actors coming out to rehearse. I had already organized a core group for the students' readings, so we right away had this vibrant community going of students, actors and playwrights. We were very interested in what we were doing and got permission to perform our results, outdoors in the spaces we had chosen, for the public, and people came. The structure was more or less set the first year, though we all thought it was for one year. It lasted seventeen years. Each of us taught two or three workshops and we all joined together, with the actors, to critique students' works on Saturday mornings. Those critiques were amazing intellectual shows in their own right, and formed the real basis for the Padua Mystique or Legend, because we all were there, we were serious playwrights, and we know how to TALK about what we were doing without bullshitting. We were talking to one another, really, as much as responding to the students. But we knew how and we made a great blend of voices, most of the time. And everyone was invited to participate. But we set a very high standard of critique at these things and they became special events and like I say, I think the heart of the program.[237]

Critique became the backbone of Padua that supported the pedagogical ideals. It was also the intellectual, sober element that fueled passion for the entity and allowed it to continue for so many years.

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[237] Murray Mednick, E-Mail to Andréa J. Onstad, Subject: ***Padua Continued***, 13 August 2007.

As mentioned previously, the only scholarly article regarding Padua that exists was written after this first Padua workshop and festival in 1978. Written by Jules Aaron and published in ***Performing Arts Journal***,[238] it is the most detailed surviving record of the time. Short of a few discrepancies, i.e., name confusion (Robert Woodruff instead of John Woodruff, which caused a momentary flurry of excitement until Murray clarified it was John, not Robert of directing fame) and seed money amount (ten thousand instead of eleven thousand), the general facts remain. Mednick did indeed bring his Theatre Genesis friends to come and work in the foothills of Southern California. This first workshop took place from July 6 through July 30, 1978. This time length would soon stretch to a seven-week bonanza. Soon-to-be theatrical luminary David Henry Hwang, on summer vacation from Stanford, attended this first workshop as a student and often credits Padua for deepening his writing.[239] In the article, there

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[238] Aaron.

[239] Hwang's first play, ***FOB***, was started at this first workshop and went on to win an Obie in 1980. Hwang says that he learned how to access his subconscious at Padua and learned how to experiment:

> It was wonderful at Padua just being around writers who weren't afraid of ***not*** making sense. I have a need to make my work all make sense on some level. But I find it more interesting to go out on a limb, to allow impulses to come in which I don't understand, and then tie them together.

is no mention or indication that the workshop would continue. Nevertheless, Mednick and Padua struck a deal; the workshop became officially the Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival and would enjoy the premises--though staying clear of the theatre--every summer thereafter. This agreement lasted five years. Then Claremont sold the property. The new owners did not want the theatre community there, and Padua found itself itinerant. For the rest of its existence, Padua struggled to find venues. This struggle, along with the ever-increasing need for funding, eventually caused its demise.

In a true East-meets-West fashion, New York's Off-Off Broadway bad boys along with Maria Irene Fornes, brought their aesthetic to bear upon the Southern California land in a spot rich with Mexican heritage where the white intruders were the real immigrants. While the essential spirit of Off-Off Broadway was contained in this experiment and surely provided its initial drive and focus, the sheer effort of mounting productions outside with no guaranteed sophisticated audience and certainly no critics, assured absolute freedom of experimentation.

> What's interesting about the subconscious is that there's usually some way the impulses do tie together and make the piece richer.

Savran, 124.

In a lyrical preface to ***Plays from the Padua Hills Playwright Festival***, John Steppling captures the unique quality exuded by Padua, a metaphoric composite likely a result of all the accidental causations of its existence and the haunting beauty of its original location:

> . . . this was a festival of the West, and as such it seemed to embrace the empty deserts and to exist in the darkness cast by the Rocky Mountains. The mythic expansiveness of American art from Melville to Pollock was always there, and the occasional swooping hawk or howl of a coyote only seemed to be the latest directorial choice from this "sight-specific" group. The festival had a masculine quality as well (and I trust nobody will take this remark as meaning in some way that the women artists weren't fully themselves or didn't help form the essence of the festival as much as the men. It seems absurd to include this disclaimer, but there you are) and a lack of attitude; it wasn't kitsch, and its irony was real and not just cleverness. To be different is to be a threat: So it has always been and so it is today.
>
> . . . The dynamics of the westward migration from the 1800s through to the Dust Bowl generation, and now from Latin America, have given the area a haunted sensibility that its artists have consistently responded to. Orson Welles said the south of anywhere was a different kind of place from the north (or something like that) and far more seductive.
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> The seductions of El Lay and SoCal are well documented (and constantly televised), but the dusty, barren, inner life, like the inner valleys of the state itself, the brutalized psyches of the forgotten and overworked, the callused and lonely, are invisible and rarely chronicled. The Padua Festival looked for a way to engage with a medium that had been sold out and made

> irrelevant, in equal parts, by the cultural arbiters of the entertainment industry and the middlebrow safety of academic and institutional theater. In entertainment, "art" is your friend, but of course it isn't it's only a salesman. Padua listened to the ghosts lost to the media, and the images it created were not of wealth or youth, but of the margins and of a hidden American mythology. Peter Brook has talked of 'theater not pretending to be other than theater,' and I think Padua came close to achieving this. Not much from the festival had series potential, and I remember few agents or producers bothering to drive out (and the ones who did had a terrible time).[240]

From 1984 to 1995, Padua was to bounce from campus to campus, from Cal-Arts to Loyola Marymount, to Chapman (which was canceled at the last minute), to the Pacific Design Center to pre-earthquake Cal State Northridge and finally to University of Southern California in 1995 where football players and unconscious, disinterested students, crashing through the outdoor site specific rehearsals finally became too much. Mednick explained to Luis Reyes of *American Theatre* magazine six years later:

> The thing that wore us all out was that we couldn't stay in one venue long enough, . . . We would have sets where people walked, we would have rehearsals all over the place, we would have workshops all over the place. We tended to take over. We were not a mild influence--we were a big influence. . . . We're going to have to find

[240] Steppling, 4-6.

> a way to keep the spirit of Padua Hills, but be indoors . . .[241]

To further nail its demise, the Audrey Skirball-Kenis Foundation pulled funding, citing Padua's inability to assemble a viable board of directors to oversee programming as the reason. Mednick, without formal announcement, declared Padua dead in December 1995, citing lack of funding and institutional support as the main cause.[242]

As he had mused to Reyes, in 2001, Mednick revamped the organization, launching Padua Playwrights Productions and naming Guy Zimmerman artistic director. He eliminated the outdoor workshop element and essentially turned Padua into a producing organization. The first season was housed at Los Angeles's 2100 Square Feet and consisted of two Mednick world premieres. In the same *American Theatre* article, Reyes reflected on the Padua past and, reading between the lines, held an eye to the revamped Padua's future:

> Always performed outdoors, the Padua Hills stagings had to confront obtrusions such as planes flying overhead, changes in the weather and inquisitive passersby. But the participating writers, directors and actors--the program always encouraged an interdisciplinary, collaborative approach to productions--had plenty of space,

[241] Reyes.

[242] Farkash, 1.

> flexibility, non-conventionality and a keen awareness of space as a mutable force in a play.[243]

As Reyes suggested, Padua revamped never again regained the stature it once held. With all unconventional attributes and challenges eliminated, there was nothing left to distinguish it from other struggling theatre venues.

During the nearly six-year hiatus, Mednick taught Shakespeare classes privately at his home to select students. These classes were conducted in a Socratic, philosopher/student manner. In 1998 or 1999, Mednick's students began discussing an interview project. When nothing came of it, Mednick began a written interview/dialogue which became known as the "INT." To date, it has not been published. It consists of questions and dialogue between Mednick, his artistic director, and several students. One student, preferring anonymity, created a composite persona. Large, unwieldy, and in need of editing, the tome contains theoretical discussions about theatre and playwriting. It is a scholar's gold mine with enormous publishing potential. The hiatus also brought

[243] Reyes.

Mednick back to New York for a residency at New Dramatists, a long overdue accolade.

During our interview communications, I asked Murray if the Padua materials had been archived. They had not. This revelation led to an investigation of the process and potential sites, the upshot being the Padua papers accepted for archival at the University of California Los Angeles. In addition, a thirty-year reunion celebration of Padua's legacy was held in June 2008. Plans for a larger fall extravaganza never got off the ground.

Padua Playwrights Productions, formed in 2001, is still in existence, primarily producing Mednick plays and those of other past Padua artists. The Padua Hills Press continues printing collections of plays written by Padua artists, distributed by Theatre Communications Group. Ever prolific, Mednick continues writing plays and has plans to resume teaching.

Padua's legacy includes some of the most visually exciting plays ever produced: Mednick's entire ***Coyote Cycle***, the first play of which inaugurated the premier festival and fully utilized the necessary outdoor location by performing in an olive grove with actors hanging from trees and emerging from the earth--the entire cycle taking

Mednick seven of the fifteen Padua years to develop, finally culminating in several all-night performances in various places around the country; John O'Keefe's ***Bercilak's Dream,*** performed in a field against the setting sun and reviewed as an art piece by Bay Area art critic Thomas Albright; Maria Irene Fornes's ***The Danube***, smoking under a stand of oaks; and countless others, all dependent on specific outdoor locations.

In all, Mednick, as artistic director, produced more than thirty-nine playwrights and at least one hundred fifty plays. And, at a minimum of twenty students per workshop, it is possible that at least three hundred hopeful, budding playwrights attended Padua throughout its existence, and that estimate is likely conservative even with many repeaters and many returning at later dates as artists. Until archives are ready for scholarly perusal, these numbers remain estimates.

Padua's mission was to "examine the creative processes of playwriting and playmaking especially with regard to awareness of space" and "to continue to evolve new methods of teaching the art."[244] Mednick cites three key results evolving from this noble and serious premise:

[244] Mednick, ***Plays from Padua Hills 1982,*** 165.

> First, an attitude which holds that the value of exploration and learning is as high as the theatrical product. This attitude informs a community of spirit wherein the art of making theatre is seen to be a tool toward a greater knowledge of one's actual situation. We feel that this has always been the traditional function of theatre in the lives of people.
>
> Secondly, we have striven for a natural balance between practice and teaching, the one seen not necessarily separate from the other. Therefore, the idea of the nobility and creativity of teaching as an art in itself is given new life. Partially because of this, we find that an atmosphere of equality and maturity arises that is difficult to discover elsewhere in theatrical circles. This, in turn, allows us to probe rather deeply into such questions as 'integrity' and 'honesty,' and, at the same time, try to provide a place for new, younger, or 'unproduced' playwrights with something real in them.
>
> Third, a breaking down of the conventional uses of space for the theatrical mode effects the use of language on 'the stage,' awakens the sense of the ceremonial, enlivens the listening qualities, and heightens the expectation for, and understanding of, what once was called the Magical.[245]

Some say there is a Padua aesthetic. That may be so. Padua-inspired plays have often been called weird or strange, and sometimes inaccessible, but they are true and always magical.

Both Mednick and Fornes demanded and won respect both for themselves and for writing. Their dedication to

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[245] Ibid.

teaching led to students evolving into artists and accepted into the fold for artistic production. Many have gone on to have visible careers in theatre.

It is easy to see, in retrospect, how Fornes, the youngest of six children emigrating to New York from Cuba in 1945 with only part of her family, and Mednick, the oldest of six children leaving New York the same year as Fornes's arrival, and both cutting their theatrical teeth during the Off-Off Broadway era, could become close friends and colleagues. Intelligence and an ability to talk about plays, paramount for a Padua-invited artist, was inherent to both though each viewed theatre through a different lens, or perhaps more accurately, through a different sensory organ--Mednick through the ears and Fornes through the eyes. Students were privileged to experience both the aural and the visual elements of theatre through the highly attuned attributes of these master teachers.

Fornes, with her visual background, was clearly influenced by working and experimenting at Padua. Her already distilled language became even more precise. Battling the elements including extraneous and annoying sound forced a sharper listening skill for both playwrights and actors. For Mednick, whose primary allegiance is to

the spoken word, forcing a site specific location necessitated a need to see and to acknowledge the influence of space and environment on a theatrical presentation. Nowhere is Mednick's growing visual awareness more evident than in ***The Coyote Cycle***, each play inherent to and built from the site for which it was designed in a manner that was both organic and environmentally conscious. In some ways, these plays pay homage to the earth. ***Switchback***, another Mednick play that represented perfectly the meld of site and play, was designed for a series of switchbacks on a trail at the Woodbury University campus, the effect of which was shimmering illusion of alternating life and death, the living and the dead, ultimately conjuring the question of existence. Many playwrights, after seeing a Padua festival, forever changed their view of theatre. David Henry Hwang, in responding to ***The Coyote Cycle*** commented:

> . . . it permanently reshaped my vision of what theatre could achieve--ritual, magic, playfulness, and respect for the playwright-actor bond entered my creative vocabulary and have been my resources ever since. . . in a day when much of the public has come to doubt the power of theatre, Murray Mednick's ***Coyote*** is proof that the best of it can still change lives.[246]

[246] Zimmerman (***Plays for a New Millennium***), 522.

David Henry Hwang is not the only stellar playwright to emerge from Padua. Jon Robin Baitz spent several summers in Padua classes mentored by John Steppling; Kelly Stuart was one of Mednick's first playwriting students at LaVerne University; Marlane Meyer was one of his first students at the University of California Long Beach.

Murray Mednick's biography as listed in ***Contemporary Authors***[247] states his career as musician, song-writer, actor, though he was quick to tell me during an E-Mail interview that he did not consider himself a musician:

> I was not and am not a musician. Sam [Shepard] was the drummer for the Holy Modal Rounders. Around the same time [as the Holy Modal Rounders], Sam and I and a guitar player named Eddie Hicks, had a little band--I forget our title, but Eddie and I wrote a lot of songs and played the music for ***The Hawk*** at Genesis--I played the tambourine, recorder, and a Pakistani practice chanter which makes a bagpipe sound. But I was not a musician. I was a Lower East Side Poet, and probably those are my roots.[248]

Challenged by the ***Contemporary Authors*** biographical entry and the unavoidable fact that he admitted playing in a band during the 1960s Off-Off Broadway movement of which he was an important part, he relented:

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[247] Nasso (Mednick).

[248] Murray Mednick, E-Mail to Andréa J. Onstad, Subject: ***Irene, Padua, and Diss-Land***, 7 October 2007.

> Well, I was a musician, we did play gigs and go around, etc., but I was first and foremost a poet. And I did not consider myself a real musician. It's important to note that all those things were connected with OOB--poetry readings, bands, and painting. All interconnecting in NY.[249]

Thus, much as Fornes, for many years, did not attribute her keen visual stage eye to her painting background, neither did Mednick attribute his sophisticated ability to hear from the stage to his musical sensitivity. This combination, mixed with a dedication to pedagogy, created a true look, listen, learn model.

Padua was Murray Mednick. But for many students, Padua was Murray Mednick and Maria Irene Fornes. There were other excellent teachers but these two embodied the mother and the father, the nurturance and discipline, and the listening and seeing so necessary in writing for the stage. If Maria Irene Fornes was deemed the eyes of the stage, Murray Mednick the ears, then "Look Listen Learn," could have been the Padua motto.

With such a fortunate combination of unique talent, it is no wonder Padua was forefront in creating innovative theatrical works and influencing several generations of

[249] Murray Mednick, E-Mail to Andréa J. Onstad, Subject: ***Irene, Padua, and Diss-Land***, 8 October 2007.

writers. It had and has no pedagogical peer. The wonder is that it has gone virtually unrecognized.

CHAPTER FOUR:
PLAYWRIGHT CHERYL SLEAN AND PLAY

I would not be the writer I am without that.

— Cheryl Slean, quoted from Telephone Interview, 5 December, 2005[250]

I met Cheryl Slean in 1991, the year I attended the Padua Hills Workshop and Festival. She was Managing Director of the Festival and extremely busy; I was a student and also busy. She resided in Los Angeles; I resided in the Bay Area although I had previously lived in Los Angeles and visited frequently. Over the years, our paths would cross now and then at the actor-created, actor-run Theatre of N.O.T.E. (technically, New One Act Theatre, but always referred to by its acronym) in Los Angeles where Cheryl was a member and where I occasionally had new work read. Through Theatre of N.O.T.E., we shared a friend who directed both of our work at different times. News of each other's adventures and misadventures was usually carried through our mutual friend. It was not until I began this

[250] Slean Interview, 5 December 2005. This comment is in direct response to a question I asked concerning how Fornes's classes at Padua and the Padua experience itself influenced Slean's writing. Her full response is quoted below. Unless otherwise noted, all information has been gleaned from communication via E-Mail, telephone, or live interview conducted between December 2005 and January 2008.

research that I extended myself directly to Cheryl Slean. Her background, provided below, describes her evolution as a theatre artist.

Background

Cheryl Slean, playwright, fiction and creative nonfiction writer, screenwriter, filmmaker, producer, editor, teacher, and all-around Renaissance writer-artist, currently lives in Seattle where she migrated from Southern California to pursue an MFA in Creative Writing-Fiction from the University of Washington-Seattle, which goal she attained in 2000. She formed her own production company, Fin Films, in 1997, and has since written, produced, directed, and edited eight films which have won numerous awards including the IFP/Seattle Spotlight Award and Best Short at the Malta International Film Festival. Her fiction has been anthologized, her essays have appeared in numerous magazines including ***Parabasis***, ***L.A. Theatres***, and ***Seattle Style***. Her plays have been produced in Los Angeles, Chicago, and Seattle with ***Swap Nite*** winning ***L.A. Weekly***'s Best Play of 1992 and ***Eclipse***, analyzed in this chapter, produced several times in Los Angeles and Chicago, and a finalist for the Actor's Theater of

Louisville Heidemann award. She has taught composition, screenwriting, playwriting, and prose writing at the University of Washington, Seattle University, Hugo House Inquiry Through Writing Program, and was Writer-In-Residence at Seattle University in 2003. She has held residencies at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts and Anderson Center in Minnesota and won numerous grants and awards for theatre.

Slean was Managing Director of the Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival from 1991 through 1992 and Publisher and Editor at the Padua Hills Press which she co-founded with Murray Mednick from 1990 through 1994, editing, designing, coordinating, distributing, and marketing ***Best of the West***, an anthology of Padua plays, in 1991, and ***The Coyote Cycle***, by Murray Mednick, in 1994.

In 1982, Slean graduated ***cum laude*** from the University of California Los Angeles with a Bachelor of Science in Astronomy degree and went to work in image processing (computing) for the aerospace industry. She worked in the aerospace industry for one year and then went into 3D visual effects for film and television at a cutting edge firm, Robert Abel and Associates. Robert Abel and Associates was among the first firms to adapt special

effects research emerging from academia for the entertainment industry, creating the field that is now responsible for the special effects (efx) now common in mainstream, big-budget Hollywood movies. Her name still appears on computer code used in films today.[251]

In addition to her interest in science, Slean was also interested in dance. She studied ballet and tap as a child, and later, in college, she studied jazz and modern dance. Slean balanced both interests by performing nights in dinner theatre productions while working days in aerospace. She recalls performing in a dinner theatre production of ***Cabaret*** atop the Holiday Inn in Torrence, California. She was 21. The cast all wore sexy ***Cabaret*** outfits and had to serve the "old fogies"[252] drinks. During the show, while performing pelvic thrusts in the "old fogies'" faces, Slean would think such thoughts as, "they're eating their chipped beef now."[253] This was, she said, her initiation into professional dance theater after

[251] ***The Golden Compass*** is specifically mentioned as an example in Cheryl Slean, E-Mail to Andréa J. Onstad, Subject: ***More Trivia***, 12 January 2008.

[252]Ki Gottberg and Cheryl Slean, Personal Interview by Andréa J. Onstad, Seattle University, Lee Center for the Arts. Seattle, Washington, 22 September 2007.

[253] Ibid.

which she took a "very long break."[254] During her special effects career, Slean began taking acting lessons and decided she wanted to become a professional actor.

At about this same time, an arts-loving friend from the company at which she worked, John Hughes,[255] invited her to attend an unusual theatrical event taking place in Los Angeles--an all-night-long production. This unusual event was the first all-night production of Murray Mednick's entire ***Coyote Cycle***. The entire cycle is comprised of seven plays and this production represented the culmination of the first seven years of site-specific Padua Workshop/Festivals.[256] Slean, knowing nothing about Padua or its productions, accepted the invitation and went.

It was 1985. The production took place on the Paramount Ranch in the Santa Monica Mountains.[257] Paramount Ranch, built by Paramount Studios, is one of Hollywood's

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[254] Ibid.

[255] Hughes is now president of Rhythm and Hues, a major animation studio. Cheryl Slean, E-Mail to Andréa J. Onstad, Subject: ***More Trivia***, 12 January 2008.

[256] According to Murray Mednick in an E-Mail dated 13 January 2008, the production "was quite an event." Darrell Larson, who performed the role of Coyote, broke his foot while jumping or falling out of the tree. Matthew Ghoulish, who had stage managed several prior years' Padua Festival productions of ***Coyote*** and who knew the role backwards and forwards, stepped in and "did a great performance."

[257] Slean identifies the location as: "a ranch in Agoura Hills which has since been subdivided into a So Cal suburb." Cheryl Slean, E-Mail to Andréa J. Onstad, Subject: ***More Trivia,*** 14 January 2008.

famed movie ranches created during the 1920s. Though much of it now is park land, a section of it is still occasionally used for filming. The all-night-long ***Coyote Cycle*** theatrical experience was a turning point in Slean's artistic career that would eventually eclipse her scientific profession. It was a moment similar to that experienced by all Padua attendees in which Slean realized the full potential of theatre beyond the stereotypical Broadway musical and upperclass drawing room drama or comedy associated with the art form. This alternate theatrical form was something she felt drawn to, something she wanted to explore.

Perhaps because major life transitions take time, Slean did not attend the next summer's, 1986, Padua Festival which she deeply regrets. The Festival that year was held at the Pacific Design Center, an extraordinarily beautiful, 14-acre site located on Melrose Avenue in the City of West Hollywood within Los Angeles which houses the MOCA (Museum of Contemporary Art) gallery as well as a theatre and many conference rooms.[258] Padua's artistic

[258] The Pacific Design Center is "known as the Blue Whale for the way in which its giant blue walls dominate the neighborhood of West Hollywood." It was an interesting move from rural to urban space, challenging the writers to explore another aspect of site-specific theatre. Don Shirley, "Padua Hills--Grounding at the Blue Whale, A

director that year was Roxanne Rogers, Sam Shepard's sister. Murray Mednick had resigned in 1987 due to burn out. His resignation was to be temporary.

At the 1986 Festival, Slean would have seen Maria Irene Fornes's ***Drowning***, a short play adapted from the Chekhov short story of the same name as well as Martin Epstein's ***Vera***, John O'Keefe's ***Babbler***, Susan Champagne's ***A Good Touch***, David Schweizer's ***The Ballad of the Sleepy Heart***, Rex Weiner's ***Mendoza***, Paul Hidalgo-Durand's ***Esperanza***, and Lynn Montgomery's ***Like a Shadow Singing.*** Several years later, she would become intimately familiar with many of the plays while editing one of Padua Press's anthologies, ***Best of the West***.

Instead of attending the 1986 Workshop/Festival, Slean focused on her desire to become an actor and joined the Theatre of N.O.T.E. N.O.T.E. eventually forged a close connection to Padua. Many actors from N.O.T.E. also acted in the Padua productions. As a result, many Padua productions were moved to N.O.T.E. after premiering at the Festivals. A similar aesthetic developed between the two entities as a result. Plays written by the major Padua stars--Mednick, O'Keefe, Steppling--are still front-runner

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Pipeline opening to the Odyssey," ***Los Angeles Times***, 4 February 1989, Calendar section, 6.

choices for production consideration at N.O.T.E. However, at the time of Slean's joining, N.O.T.E.'s predominate acting style and script preference were more Hollywood-realistic. Padua was not yet on its radar.

N.O.T.E. had a playwriting workshop for members. Slean joined, and while attending, wrote her first play, ***Palmdale***, which was produced at N.O.T.E. in 1987. Thus she shares with both Fornes and Mednick the heady exhilaration, confidence, and sometimes hubris, that comes with experiencing one's first work being produced. She had, however, no further contact with Padua or anything connected to Padua, until 1989.

In the spring of 1989, Slean heard about an upcoming reading[259] with Murray Mednick's name associated and, recalling the "awesome"[260] ***Coyote Cycle*** performance, was

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[259] According to Slean, "Padua generally sponsored an annual spring reading featuring new work from the LA-based Padua students, mostly, and sometimes the playwrights. The playwrights came and everyone (students, playwrights, actors) was encouraged to give feedback. . . . Murray occasionally chose pieces for the festival from these readings, but mostly it was just a Padua community event and a reminder that the festival was coming up in a couple of months. Slean E-Mail, 14 January 2008.

According to Murray, however, ". . . it was not an annual event. I did it if there were students or other writers who needed it for one reason or another. I also may have done a couple for my private classes. But it wasn't an annual Padua event. We also may have done one or two in association with one of the colleges we were involved with." Murray Mednick, E-Mail to Andréa J. Onstad, Subject: ***Greetings,*** 13 January 2008.

[260] Slean E-Mail, 14 January 2008.

compelled to attend. After the reading, she introduced herself to Mednick and told him she wanted to "vie for a spot in that summer's workshop"[261] to which he immediately responded, "You're in."[262] She attended, and from then on became increasingly involved with Padua and Padua's affairs.

The 1989 Festival saw a change in venue from the Melrose Pacific Design Center to the Art and Design Center at California State University-Northridge campus (known as the epicenter of the 1994 Southern California 6.8 earthquake), located northeast of Los Angeles proper but still within easy commuting distance for area residents used to Southern California freeways. Murray Mednick reclaimed Artistic Directorship. The "R&R" he managed to attain during his prior-year hiatus resulted in an energy surge manifesting in an ambitious "A" and "B" season of eight plays, the "A" and "B" designations an organizational and marketing device to help manage the extraordinary amount of productions--fewer from a past high of eleven in 1982, but just as unwieldy from a management point of view.

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[261] Ibid.

[262] Ibid. She commented further, "Little did I know, Padua always had trouble getting enough students willing to pay the tuition, which was a big part of the production budget for the fest."

Slean was exposed to the plays, pedagogy, and artistic temperaments of playwright Alan Bolt who presented ***Amado Amor*** (***Beloved Love***), Susan Mosakowski--***Cities Out of Print***, Martin Epstein--***The Ordeal of Nancy Ferguson***, John Pappas--***Increments of Three***, Leon Martell--***Kindling***, Julie Hebert--***Almost Asleep***, Maria Irene Fornes--***Oscar and Bertha***, John Steppling--***The Theory of Miracles***, as well as classes led by Murray Mednick, Roxanne Rogers, Lin Hixson, Jon Robin Baitz, Eduardo Machado, and David Henry Hwang[263] (who made several appearances as a teacher at various Padua Festival/Workshops after his initial exposure as a student at the inaugural event).

Slean's memory at this point becomes slippery--the 1989-1990 Festival/Workshops blurring together. I carefully checked facts which aided her recall, but as is often the case with memory-based interviews, there is no guarantee of absolute accuracy. Slean cites Fornes's production of ***Oscar and Bertha***--the production she remembers most clearly from the 1989 Festival, likely because she later published it--as possibly giving her

[263] Janice Arkatov, "Where Playwriting is Still the Thing," ***Los Angeles Times***, 6 July 1989, Calendar section, 1.

"unconscious permission"[264] to write more openly about family as she later did in ***Eclipse.*** It is apparent that Padua and Padua teachers and productions were already giving her "permission" to explore writing through examination of the unconscious and the self.

As is customary with first-time, pivotal experiences, there was much to absorb and much to revisit. Slean was compelled to return to the 1990 Workshop/Festival, again held at the California State University campus.

It was common practice at Padua for a returning student to be hired as a coordinator or given some other position in lieu of tuition. The cost of attending Padua, while not astronomical by today's standards, did require a commitment of several months and often relocation which necessitated negotiating many logistical challenges--how to keep one's job or whether or not to quit one's job, apartment subletting or absorbing the cost of double rent--daunting financial decisions that often eliminated the possibility of attending more than once. But tuition costs also greatly helped fund the cost of running Padua, so

[264] "I think the bitchiness of that play--how mean the characters are to each other, constantly insulting, etc., resonated with me because that's how my family/lower middle class culture spoke growing up. Showing your love through insult. I hadn't thought of it before now, but maybe ***O&B*** gave me unconscious permission to write all this nasty dialogue that came up again and again in the plays, especially among family members." Slean E-Mail, 12 January 2008.

tuition waiver became a double-bind for those who ran the program. Padua management needed student help but could not expect students to pay to provide this help year after year. Offering some sort of job and waiving tuition and lodging costs encouraged student return and was further evidence of Mednick's interest in mentoring students in all aspects of theatre, giving them the kind of total involvement he himself experienced in his Off-Off Broadway years. However, hiring students for highly visible and demanding jobs was unusual.

At this, her second Workshop/Festival, Slean recalled that students could choose to be intern production assistants. She does not recall taking advantage of this opportunity at the 1989 Workshop/Festival, nor if she did, with whom she may have worked. It is possible that student internships had not yet been implemented in the 1989 Workshop/Festival or it may be that Slean blended the memory of the two Workshop/Festivals together in her mind. In any case, during the production meeting for the 1990 Festival, Roxanne Rogers requested Slean who must have made an impression on Roxanne from the previous year (not to mention it was certainly more beneficial to utilize someone familiar with the process). Rogers' request, of course,

eliminated Slean from making her own choice which likely would have been requesting to work on Mednick's show. However, in her own words, she told me she was "TOTALLY GUNG HO," "basically produced Roxanne's show," ***Book of Numbers,*** and "did a bunch of other work for Padua."[265]

The 1990 shows Slean could have chosen to work on were Kelly Stuart's ***Ball and Chain***, Martin Epstein's ***Our Witness***, John Steppling's ***Storyland***, and Susan Champagne's ***Bondage*** of the "A" Series; and Murray Mednick's ***Shatter 'n Wade***, Alan Bolt's ***Salsa Opera***, Leon Martell's ***Brick Time Stories: Tales of Death and Recipes of Mayhem***, with, of course, Roxanne Rogers' ***Book of Numbers***, constituting the "B" Series. This eight play Festival was another ambitious undertaking.[266] ***Shatter 'n Wade*** is the play that she most clearly remembers from this festival and "can still quote some lines from it."[267]

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[265] Ibid.

[266] The listings of the 1989 and 1990 Padua seasons reveals the conspicuous absence of Padua regular, John O'Keefe. 1989 found him at Sundance Film Institute developing his one-man play, ***Shimmer***, into film, and touring the theatrical version throughout the United States and Europe. The feature film that emerged as a result of the Sundance residency was produced by American Playhouse and broadcast nationally winning him the New York Bessie Award. Thus, Cheryl did not experience O'Keefe as a teacher but was to experience producing his work when he returned in 1991 to teach and workshop a new theatre piece.

[267] Slean E-Mail, 12 January 2008.

Towards the end of the 1990 Workshop/Festival, in an unprecedented display of his belief in pedagogy and student support and clearly exhibiting full faith and trust in her managerial abilities despite her age and experience, Mednick appointed Slean Managing Director of Padua for the 1991 season, which post she held for the next two years.[268] In her own words:

> I remember one day of student readings I was bringing him [Mednick] lunch, and it was this huge thing from the local natural market (in Northridge) so he split it with me, and then when I'd taken a big mouthful he just up and asked me: Do you want to be managing director next year? I think it was a leap of faith on his part, I certainly did not feel qualified or whatever, but I think he was looking for someone who was totally behind his vision that could organize. I was young, he knew I completely respected him and would serve at his behest, and I think that was ideal for him. Until Guy [Zimmerman], he always hired women in that position, (so common in LA-- women producing the men's visions).[269]

[268] There was no actual Festival/Workshop in 1992 or 1993 but there was a Shakespeare Workshop for Writers and Actors sponsored by Padua as well as two plays by Padua artists presented at Theatre of N.O.T.E. in 1993. There was still, however, considerable work to be done, money to be raised, grants to be written. Slean secured the funding from the Audrey-Skirball Kenis Foundation that was to be Padua's primary financial support for the next couple of years and in fact, until ASK pulled the funding in 1995 citing Padua's inability to assemble a viable board of directors, it was Padua's major financial source. In addition, Padua Hills Press was created with Slean acting as both publisher and editor.

[269] Slean E-Mail, 12 January 2008.

1991, the year I attended, was another big year for Padua with seven productions in an "A" and "B" series, again held at the Art and Design Center at California State University at Northridge. With Slean's new duties, she found herself too busy to attend many classes or experience student privilege. Nevertheless, she was fully exposed to the playwrights and their artistic temperaments as she managed all aspects of their productions, lodging, salary, in addition to her many other duties. The "A" Series included Robert Hummer's ***Fetters***, Susan Champagne's ***Song of Songs***, Susan Mosakowski's ***The Tight Fit*** (on which I assisted), and Julie Hebert's ***The Knee Desires the Dirt.*** The "B" Series included Kelly Stuart's ***The Interpreter of Horror***, Murray Mednick's ***Heads***, and John O'Keefe's ***The Promotion***. Slean had a small part in Stuart's play "wearing big fake boobs and lycra pants."[270]

I saw Slean only briefly now and then--first at registration and here and there at the office and around the campus, then later at a spaghetti dinner she hosted in her living quarters--a dorm room--on the campus. She was not in any of the classes I attended, her duties keeping her fully occupied. Several years later, we rekindled our

[270] Ibid.

acquaintance at Theatre of N.O.T.E. A mutual friend was directing a reading of the play I had begun writing at Padua and Slean was one of the readers. I recall her stating at the subsequent debate whether or not N.O.T.E. should produce the play and that my voice needed to be heard. It was not to be. The voting members voted five to four not to produce. My Los Angeles presence was weak. I had moved to Northern California in 1989 and was no longer visible in the Los Angeles theatre scene, making it difficult to press further.[271]

Playwriting Influence

Unlike Ki Gottberg and me, Slean's exposure to Maria Irene Fornes's pedagogy and her work was only at Padua. She never, for instance, experienced the humiliation of Fornes's criticism common at other venues and still refers to the noncritical aspect of Fornes's Padua teaching as that which she most appreciated, finding it very freeing and contributing to an atmosphere in which it was safe-to-share--a strategy which she has incorporated into her own classroom. She stated:

[271] I learned later that several of my plays had been considered for production. There had been in-house readings that I was not told about. I was not to get another reading at N.O.T.E. (to which I was invited) until 2004 at which time, again, the vote to produce was no.

> As you know, Irene gave no feedback. You shared what you'd written and she said thank you and then on to the next. I actually use that model in my classes now; if it's work that was just now written in an exercise, there's no point in giving feedback on something so raw. So I just say thank you, and we move on.[272]

However, her exposure to the whole of Padua was far more extensive and influential than it was for either Gottberg or myself. Her theatrical teeth were literally cut on Padua experience: art, artists, politics, intrigue, financials, everything. The impact of that sort of exposure--from student to Managing Directorship in one year's time--is a mind-boggling leap. Essentially, Slean's MFA program ***was*** Padua. In recent conversations with her and in light of her creation of a Padua-inspired site-specific festival with co-creator Ki Gottberg, it is clear that Padua, generally, rather than Fornes, singularly, was the greater influence in Slean's development as a theatre artist. Murray Mednick was indeed her mentor though Maria Irene Fornes was a major influence in the development of her writing and her self as an artist. In direct response to the question of mentorship, she stated:

> I would say yes, that Murray is definitely my primary theater mentor, because I worked with him day to day on Padua business, and took many of

[272] Slean E-Mail, 12 January 2008.

> the classes he offered in between summer workshops, so I had more exposure to him. But Irene was definitely a strong influence, she and Natalie Goldberg, in terms of writing from impulse or the unknown or unconscious or whatever you want to call it. Murray had a lot of that too (as you mention writing from the body--I think I did do that three-hour exercise you mentioned) but was also very intellectually rigorous, especially in analysis/feedback/ critique.[273]

The year Slean became Managing Director was the year in which Fornes did not produce a play in the Padua Festival. Slean confessed that she had been a bit nervous about working with Fornes because she had heard stories about working with her as a director, that she was demanding, that she was a perfectionist. Slean was "a little scared"[274] and more than a bit relieved that she did not have to coordinate a Fornes production. As quoted fully in Chapter One and repeated here for emphasis, Slean said: "Irene was a formidable presence; you didn't want to cross her."[275]

During the 1992-1993 Padua hiatus, Slean continued to work with Mednick on the Padua Press anthologies but stepped down as Managing Director before the next

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[273] Ibid.

[274] Slean Interview, 5 December 2005.

[275] Ibid.

Workshop/Festival to concentrate on her writing. As per his pedagogical belief in supporting and producing his best students, Mednick had asked her to write a play for that festival but Fornes decided to come at the last minute to workshop ***Terra Incognita*** and Slean had to give up her spot. Slean wound up acting in Susan Champagne's ***Away From Me***, advising and hand-holding the new, green, Managing Director, and acting as unofficial social director, putting together several "insane aftershow parties for cast and crew."[276]

The whole of that penultimate Workshop/Festival, which took place in 1994 on the Woodbury University campus in Burbank, consisted of Neena Beber's ***Failure to Thrive***, John O'Keefe's ***Disgrace***, Maria Irene Fornes's ***Terra Incognita***, and John Steppling's ***Understanding the Dead*** making up the "A" series, and Murray Mednick's ***Switchback***, Susan Mosakowski's ***Locofoco***, Shem Bitterman's ***Justice*** and Susan Champagne's ***Away From Me*** making up the "B" series.[277] This festival was the last Slean attended.

1995 marked the final Padua Workshop/Festival. It took place on the University of Southern California campus.

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[276] Slean E-Mail, 12 January 2008.

[277] I was invited to attend this Workshop/Festival as a student-coordinator but ultimately was unable to negotiate the logistics to do so.

The itinerant nature, the funding, the logistics finally became too much. When ASK pulled all funding, it was the end. It is speculation whether or not the Festival would have continued had Slean continued on as Managing Director. Managing Directors tended to burn out and without a steady supply of qualified and competent help, it proved impossible to continue. The final Festival consisted of Maria Irene Fornes's ***Summer in Gossensass***, Kelly Stuart's ***Demonology***, and Gil Kaufman ***Entrevista 187*** making up the "A" series and Marlane Meyer's ***The Chemistry of Change***, Murray Mednick's ***Freeze***, and Joe Goodrich's ***Steak Knife Baccae*** making up the "B" series. By December of 1995, as stated earlier, Murray Mednick declared Padua officially dead.[278]

Padua had a particular aesthetic, one in which, as Slean described, students could get stuck and never find their own voice; one in which practitioners could remain poor in the financial sense as the work itself became more interesting than the product. Nevertheless, Padua pedagogy was, for her, nonconforming, and set her work off in new

[278] Don Shirley, "Padua Hills Fest Bites the Dust," ***Los Angeles Times***, 10 December 1995, Calendar section, 48.

directions. She said, "I would not be the writer I am without that."[279]

Plays

Swap Nite was the first play to evolve from Slean's Padua exposure and the first one-act of which she was truly proud. It was produced at Theatre N.O.T.E. in 1992 and won ***L.A. Weekl***y's Best Play of 1992, as previously mentioned, as well as honorable mention in HBO's One-Act competition. Slean later adapted ***Swap Nite*** into a full-length film script which became a finalist for both Sundance Labs and the Chesterfield Film Writer's fellowship.

Swap Nite embodies the Southern California aesthetic which is almost gothic in its scope. Its location is an abandoned drive-in movie theatre lot at the edge of the Southern California desert. Before their final demise into housing tracts, drive-in movie theatre lots were used as weekend flea markets, sometimes called swap meets.[280] ***Swap Nite***'s crazy caretaker/projectionist lurks, immersed in

[279] Slean Interview, 5 December 2005.

[280] Coincidentally, flea markets and second hand stores were favorite haunts of Fornes who was already renowned for shaping ***Mud*** and ***The Danube*** around objects discovered on her regular rounds. Slean was taking Fornes's passion a step further by literally situating her play in this locale.

dream and fantasy. Under his control in the projection booth, dreams intercept dreams until, like the desert surround, the play itself becomes mirage. Slean often drove out to the desert when she lived in Los Angeles. Consequently, her first two plays, ***Palmdale*** and ***Swap Nite***, were, thematically, in location and sensibility terms, desert plays. She explains:

> The curious thing about ***Swap Nite*** is I sort of conceived the idea, then wrote the first scene in Irene's workshop summer of '89, from her "picture a place" exercise, where you draw the place and then write a scene in it. (That scene ended up in the play as I recall.) And I was thinking of the imagined, "actual" place and thinking of our theater at the same time. The N.O.T.E. of that time had two levels of stage, and I imagined the upper level as the projectionist's booth, and the lower level as the snack bar. But the "real" place in my imagination was a whole big outdoor drive-in, with the screen on one end, and nothing--just wide open desert--on the other. Not even a back fence. Just the speaker poles run out and then there's desert. And as it turns out, not long after I started writing the play (I don't remember if I had a draft yet), I was driving out by Barstow and I found an old drive-in that was exactly like what I'd pictured in my head. It was so strange!!! Serendipitous. There was an old crusty caretaker who lived there, who had been the projectionist, and we made friends, and I visited him a few times and brought him cartons of cigarettes and took him to lunch, and he gave me (not loaned--gave) a bunch of the drive-in stuff for my set: old film reels, a period popcorn machine(!), etc.[281]

[281] Slean E-Mail, 12 January 2008.

The actual playscript of ***Swap Nite*** is no longer available. A critical comparison, then, of scene to exercise or playscript to filmscript cannot be accomplished. However, Slean stresses that the exercises that helped birth the play--imagine the place, imagine the people in the place, then begin drawing the place, the set, the people--all, but especially the physical act of drawing these elements, succeeded in triggering her unconscious to manifest these elements in a three-dimensional form in a near-magical manner. Slean states above that she serendipitously found the very place she created in her imagination by using these exercises. In some ways, this way of writing is similar to the self-help guidebooks that counsel one to write, draw, or cut out pictures of one's desires in order to help manifest them in reality. It may be that that by becoming more fully physically realized, desires are more recognizable when they appear. In the case of writing, if one can fully imagine a scene with all its components--sensory and physical--one truly can create life in a near three-dimensional form.

Slean's experience--that of finding the very location she had imagined and drawn in detail during Fornes's class--was, in fact, the very essence of the Padua mystique.

Many Padua attendees experienced that near magical, almost spooky experience of the imagination coming fully three-dimensionally, alive. It was easy, too, to get trapped into that moment, that experience, rather than pull the work further into a more public arena, which is what I believe Slean was referring to when she mentioned being caught in the Padua aesthetic where the process became more fascinating than the product. The necessity of honing that initial vision so that it was understandable to all was a process sometimes forgotten.

Fornes, then, as teacher, was truly able to open the door to that underlying creative force latent in many of her students. Mednick, with his rigorous intellectual demands of strict focus and attention, heightened the concentration. Between the two master teachers, if one were paying full attention, one could get swept away into the reality of one's imagination. If this experience occurred, writing became near religion. Padua truly did attempt to create life and to experience theatre as close to the Greek celebration of life as was possible. This truth in creation and the ability to manifest that truth is what made Padua the most unique playwriting workshop in the country. Once a student experienced something akin to what

Slean experienced, there was no going back to the rigors and tedium of classroom playwriting by formula.

Padua artists and teachers were so intertwined that Slean feels it is impossible to separate her plays from the Padua process or to decipher precisely what teaching moments inspired what scenes. She feels she did not, however, become a writer because of Padua--that she was already--it was more as if she were "given permission"[282] to become the writer she became by the Padua hallmarks of pedagogy: experimentation, pushing boundaries, trusting the unconscious and following it to, in her case, the edge of the desert. She explains:

> All my writing then was heavily influenced by Padua pedagogy/methods, but resemblance to any particular play would be purely coincidental, or from osmosis rather than consciously 'modeling after.' I had read a lot of Fornes, but there weren't many productions of her work in L.A. beside the festival shows. I was mostly familiar with ***Oscar and Bertha*** since I published it . . . . I hadn't thought of it before now, but maybe ***O&B*** gave me unconscious permission to write all this nasty dialogue that came up again and again in the plays, especially among family members. Not so much in ***Eclipse***, but some.[283]

For her and for Padua writers generally, whose plays were often mysterious and difficult to pinpoint, metaphor--a

[282] Ibid.

[283] Ibid.

valued, always sought-after quality--it seemed, was paramount. Metaphor is especially obvious in Slean's 1994 short play, ***Eclipse***, which I pointed out to her in one of our E-mail exchanges. She responded:

> The metaphorical quality you speak of is just something I always had/tried for as a writer. If the situation and actions did not have metaphorical resonance, there was no use writing about it, as far as I was concerned. I still feel that way about writing; if there's no bigger, poetic or existential meaning being accumulated or pointed to, what's the point? You might as well be writing journalism. And letting the metaphor/meaning live and vibrate in the language and actions and images, without explanation, is another thing I always felt was right but got *permission to allow* from Irene and Murray and Padua. Mainstream culture is just so bent on explaining, answering every question that is raised. Look at all the fucking police procedurals on TV. People want the mystery solved at the end of the hour. So what I learned from I[rene] and M[urray] and the other Padua writers is to cultivate and allow mysterious doings in the work, under the surface as well as on top. I have had to work over the years with finding balance between mystery and just plain mystification, but I still value any piece of work that doesn't try to explain.[284]

Analysis of ***Eclipse***

Eclipse was written in 1994 as an entry for the Actors Theatre of Louisville Ten-Minute Play Contest[285] and it was, in fact, a finalist for the Heideman award. It was the

[284] Ibid.

[285] Ibid.

first play Slean wrote that interwove autobiographical elements directly. Most of the plays written during her Padua period utilized "completely invented characters and situations" to express her "questions, fears, ideas," and, perhaps, enacted her "emotional knots, etc."[286] Slean found many of the Padua exercises excellent tools to jumpstart the imagination. For instance, she recalls one of the Workshop teachers passing around family snapshots they'd found in a thrift store[287] and having the students invent people, relationships, situations from these cards. Commenting on this exercise, she explains:

> Of course they are bound to reflect our own histories and inner lives, but for some reason my plays (as opposed to my more recent prose work) are very much invented."[288]

Eclipse, however, was different. Much of the material in it was personal. The scene in which the Mother shaves the Girl's armpits actually happened to Slean; she did play with shoes in her closet; her brother did work on cars in

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[286] Ibid.

[287] Slean attributes this to possibly Roxanne Rogers or Susan Champagne. However, I distinctly remember Fornes using this exercise in one of her classes I attended at Padua. It was so characteristic of Fornes to bring in items she only recently found at a second hand store, I suspect the teacher was Fornes.

[288] Slean E-Mail, 12 January 2008.

the driveway and someone's father, not her own, did show her the pinhole-in-the-paper trick during an eclipse.

Eclipse is a series of moments in Girl's life that take place just before the total eclipse of the sun, but is also, metaphorically, the moment of Girl's change from prepubescent to young woman. Without an Aristotelian arc of clear conflict, crisis and catharsis, there is only an ominous building of danger as the eclipse approaches. Of the six characters, only two are female and called simply, Girl and Mother (Girl's mother). The male characters have one-syllable names: Mac (Girl's father), Mac, Jr. (Girl's brother) Joe and Tom (teenage boys) and are involved in stereotypical masculine activities--the teenage boys working on an engine, the father reading Winston Churchill's biography. Their presence and activities loom large--ominous and vaguely threatening.

In some ways, this deliberate contrasting of the female and male characters is reminiscent of Fornes's work, for example, ***Oscar and Bertha***, which was the first Fornes play to which Slean was exposed and likely, then, the one with the most lasting impression. All of the characters in ***Oscar and Bertha*** were originally played by female actors, including the 45-year-old Oscar and the 40-year-old Pike.

Although all of the characters are named in ***Oscar and Bertha*** (most of Fornes's characters are; however, in ***The Successful Life of Three***, the characters are designated simply as He and She), the effect of women playing grotesque and fiendish men (Oscar is a foul-mouthed misogynist in a wheelchair) creates an intellectual rather than stereotypical milieu ultimately leading to cultural criticism.

Eclipse is also reminiscent of Fornes's ***Mud***. Mae, the single female character in ***Mud***, bears some resemblance to Girl[289] in ***Eclipse*** in her refusal to accept ultimate victimization through a certain, near-innocent hopefulness and through her interest in books. Girl's corresponding interest is in astronomy. Both read (***Eclipse*** begins with reading), both value knowledge, language, and learning. Both plays, too, are composed of short scenes of isolated, high-point moments.[290]

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[289] Although there are two female characters in ***Eclipse***, Mother is more complicit with the male characters, leaving Girl to navigate misogyny on her own.

[290] It is possible that the structure of the Fornes and Padua workshops encouraged short scene work resulting in collage-type plays instead of sustained, lengthy plays. Singular exercises tend to create singular, high-point, or moment scenes rather than sustained scenes with a clear beginning-middle-end. It is sometimes unconsciously easier to juxtapose a number of scenes composed in class to create a play than to fill out one or two short scenes composed in the classroom.

By not naming the female characters in ***Eclipse***, Slean achieves universality of the female coming-of-age experience. Curiously, Mother is not a very sympathetic character. Her rough demeanor and lack of sensitivity regarding her daughter--shaving her underarms, for instance--resonates as a negative mannerism, joining in near complicity with the father's vaguely incestuous predation. The general lack of concern by all family members for Girl's safety and well-being highlights her isolation from the family.

As the moment of the eclipse nears, family members are almost inexplicably drawn to Girl. Victimization, martyrdom, or simply awareness through metaphor--the ultimate meaning is ambiguous, but the feeling of that moment of the onset of puberty resonates and the entire mis-en-scène supports and is included in the metaphor.

Slean recalls writing the closet scene in ***Eclipse*** from an exercise dealing with childhood memories and sense memory in one of Fornes's workshops.[291] The scene is filled

[291] It is not uncommon for a writer to search archival notebooks and discover prior writing, sometimes done years before. The timing of Slean's statement, i.e., that she wrote it right in a Fornes workshop, seems at first unlikely but from my own experience of "finding" old writing, it is possible that she did. Again, memory is a slippery thing. When I first interviewed Slean in 2005 she recalled this writing experience definitively; when I interviewed her in 2008, she had forgotten it.

with sensual, rich, texture--the smell of “chewed up wood,” the “so cool it feels wet” sensation of being “frozen” in a tight space, the visual effect of the light patterns coming through the cracks of the partially closed door, the sound of a rattling doorknob. One can almost hear Fornes guiding the sense memory aspects: “imagine the smells, the sounds, how the room feels, the light,” then encouraging drawing, then interjecting words and phrases to jumpstart dialogue.[292]

In this scene, Girl is playing with shoes in the closet, just as Slean did as a child. Girl is pubescent:

> (Lights up. GIRL kneels in the closet. She plays with two shoes that have washcloths draped around their "shoulders" like robes. GIRL has a different play voice for each shoe)
>
> QUEEN SHOE
> Let's go out to the throne room.
>
> KING SHOE
> No, you must stay here.
> (Jumping squares)
> Here, and here.
>
> QUEEN SHOE
> In the closet?
>
> KING SHOE
> Yes, you must stay in the closet. To protect your head and face.

[292] Slean found the Fornes exercises that began with drawing and included interjection of random words, phrase, and actions, designed to keep the dialogue fresh, the most helpful.

QUEEN SHOE
Oh dear, there are termites. Everything smells like chewed up wood.

KING SHOE
But it's cool. So cool that it feels wet.

QUEEN SHOE
I think about recirculation. How long does it take to suffocate in a closet? I'd like to let some air in. . .

KING SHOE
. . .but that would be too dangerous.

QUEEN SHOE
Sometimes in my closet I feel frozen. . . If I move one inch I will scrape against a wall. I'll hit my head on the ceiling and all my brains will seep out. O King, whatever shall I do?

KING SHOE
Your closet, Queen, is good for playing Lite-Brite. You arrange the plastic pins in the dark and they shine and shine. You can make up colored patterns. They're lovely in the night-- I'll shut your door down tight.

QUEEN SHOE
But O, will I be safe? Will my face stay on my head?

KING SHOE
Of course, of course. The night will only last this long.
(Measuring a tiny inch with her fingers)
And remember, you must not look in the corners.

QUEEN SHOE
The corners! Where the walls and floor meet squarely. I must not look in the corners.

(The lights dim. Pretty colored patterns light up in the darkness)

GIRL
At night the road is a red and white snake
Inching up the hillside
And clouds sail like galleons
Across the milky sky. . .

(A doorknob rattles. GIRL scrunches up into a ball.

Blackout.)[293]

Although there is no clear resolution in ***Eclipse***, one is left with a sense of understanding, completion and an inevitable disturbing but indefinable fate. Slean, through Fornes's tutelage, effectively and reflexively turned her autoethnographic researcher "eye" upon herself and, while not using the autobiographical "I" in the work as did Ellis in her autoethnograpic novel already mentioned, she nonetheless, positioned herself within the play as "Girl" by discovering the character within her own memories. Girl becomes a metaphor for every young girl reaching young womanhood. The ending scene illustrates that precise moment:

[293] Cheryl Slean, ***Eclipse: A Very Short Play***, Unpublished, 1994, 5-6.

(Lights up on the boys in exactly the same spot, doing exactly the same thing, as yesterday. Periodically, JOE scrapes around in the toolbox. After a pause, MAC JR. hurts himself on something)

MAC JR.
Shit! Mother fucker!

JOE
(Digging in the toolbox)
There's somethin' wrong with my eyes. I can't see right.

TOM
Yeah. Too much dope.

MAC JR.
Shut up you fuckin retard.

(GIRL runs in and stops a few feet from JOE)

GIRL
Hey! Hey!

(JOE notices her. He checks to see if the other guys have noticed him noticing her. Then he sidles over)

GIRL
You're missing it.

JOE
Oh yeah?

GIRL
Can't you feel it? The air is heavier. It's definitely happening.

JOE
You're cute. The little sister.

GIRL
It'll be over before you're ready and then you'll have MISSED OUT!

JOE
The little sister got all grown up.

GIRL
DO NOT LOOK DIRECTLY AT IT, see? It's happening right now! Right at this moment! NOW!

(She holds up her paper, looks down at the shadow cast on the ground. JOE leans close to her. He runs his hand slowly down her body)

JOE
Hey big girl. Meet me at the rope swing in a hour.

(JOE lets his hand linger on her breast. . . GIRL is frozen. JOE backs off, and exits. GIRL's hands drift to her face)

GIRL
Do not look directly at it.

(The lights begin to change)

GIRL
First contact. . .

(GIRL starts to rip the paper into tiny bits)

GIRL
First contact, 12:01 PM. A tiny nick appears on the west side of the Sun.

Second contact is totality. . . 1:35 PM.

Five minutes to totality. The sky darkens. The darkness of the sky begins to close in around you. The Moon eats into the Sun.

One minute to totality. The crescent Sun is now a blazing white sliver in a sky filled with stars. Minutes become seconds. The sliver breaks up into beads of light ringing a deep black disk. 10 seconds, 5 seconds-- the beads now

GIRL (Cont'd)
fuse into one. Fiery diamond, one. Last dot of sunlight. . .

Disappears, as if it were sucked into an abyss.

Totality.

You are standing in the shadow of the Moon.

(GIRL looks up into the sky.

Lights fade to orange, then black.)

-END-[294]

Since graduate school, Slean has been "trying to make peace with narrative[295]" and though "no fan of Aristotelian plots,"[296] she finds it difficult not to "construct some kind of narrative when writing in language that proceeds temporally forward."[297] If the story is driven by or in service to the plot as in the case of most mainstream movies, theatre and general storytelling, it becomes manipulative. She states:

> But if the resolution is more open-ended, if the plot arises organically from complex characters and situations, it can be a beautiful thing. Theatre as a form asks for a more theatrical approach. The poetry of spoken language shifts

[294] Ibid., 8-10.

[295] Cheryl Slean, E-mail to Andréa Onstad, Subject: ***Fornes***, 12 December 2005.

[296] Ibid.

[297] Ibid.

> the emphasis towards poesy, language that points toward meaning rather than plot resolution, plots in service to theme or meaning. If that's not happening, it's not art.[298]

While an argument could be made that the device of the approaching eclipse of the sun in ***Eclipse*** is an Aristotelian arc, it is not within the characters that this arc occurs but within a natural phenomenon (i.e., the sun), quite beyond any structural planned plot, therefore metaphorical, not structural, the essential ingredient in Slean's writing.

Of the Padua women writers, Slean arguably best embodies Southern California, the El Lay-SoCal aesthetic of which John Steppling speaks.[299] Her SoCal gothic desert mirages--***Palmdale*** and ***Swap Nite***--shimmer with the conflicting emotions of hope and hopelessness, the emptiness of the desert echoing in the hollow of the characters' lives. Even ***Eclipse***, though not of the desert, has a hot, stifling, sensibility. The focus of the sun seems to suggest its ultimate control--and all of nature's control--over our lives. The desert juxtaposed with the Los Angeles/Hollywood life style, creates a kind of

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[298] Ibid.

[299] Steppling, "When There is Nothing to Sell," 5-6, quoted in Chapter Three, above.

internal dreamscape, a mirage of the outer landscape, reflecting sand, sun, and relentless, hopeless hope.

Eclipse

a very short play

by Cheryl Slean

Cast of Characters

GIRL	a pubescent girl
MAC	girl's father
JOE, TOM	teenage boys
MAC JR.	girl's brother
MOTHER	girl's mom

All characters are played by adults.

The set is minimal and suggestive.

(GIRL sits cross legged in her closet: a small, square patch of light. She reads from a book open on her knees)

GIRL
(Reading)
". . .and for that instant the dark body of the Moon was suddenly surrounded with a corona, a kind of bright glory, similar in shape and magnitude to that which painters draw round the heads of saints. But the most remarkable circumstance attending the phenomenon was the appearance of three large protuberances . . ."

(She lifts her head up from the book. Looks behind her. Pause)

GIRL
(Resuming reading)
". . .protuberances, apparently emanating from the circumference of the Moon. Splendid and astonishing was this remarkable phenomenon, yet I must confess there was at the same time something in its singular appearance that was appalling."

(A doorknob rattles. GIRL is frightened. Blackout.

Lights up on three boys bent over an engine. JOE, TOM, MAC JR. JOE periodically digs through a toolbox, making a percussive, grating sound)

MAC JR.
I'm yankin' the stock slushbox.

JOE
Cool.

TOM
Yeah.

(JOE scrapes in the toolbox)

MAC JR.
Wanna Vortech B-trim gearcharger with a Turbo 400 aftermarket stall converter.

JOE
(Pause)
Bitchen.

TOM
(Pause)
Yeah.

MAC JR.
Then down to a semi-hemi big block--

JOE
(Over)
Cool.

TOM
(Over)
Awright.

MAC JR.
(Over)
--four-barrel fuel-injection throttle trashes the carb. . .

JOE
(Over)
Awright.

TOM
(Over)
Cool.

MAC JR.
(Over)
. . .Kenne Bell twin-screw supercharger cam, pro mass air torque conversion, Hooker headers, and the whole damn thing ridin on four bigass sticky Mickeys!

JOE
Killer smokey burnouts!

TOM
Wicked launches!

MAC JR.
Fuckin' A horsepower!

(GIRL enters)

MAC JR.
Gimme a 5/8.

(JOE digs through the toolbox. GIRL approaches)

GIRL
Hey, guess what? I gotta secret.

JOE
Look at that. Your sister's growin' up.

TOM
Awright.

(MAC JR. looks where they're looking, then looks away)

MAC JR.
Fuckin' new semi-hemis gotta relocated oil galley, right next to the camshaft. Improves lubrication.

(GIRL sneaks a peek at the boys. JOE and TOM eye her like dogs)

GIRL
Blockheads, I gotta secret!

(GIRL runs off. MAC JR. takes his head out from under the hood)

MAC JR.
What're you lookin' at.

(Blackout.

Lights up on MAC, sitting in his chair, reading a Winston Churchill biography. GIRL enters, runs over to him. She looks like she has to pee)

GIRL
Daddy, daddy. . . daddy!

MAC
(Ignoring her)
What is it honey.

GIRL
Daddy, is it today? It's today?

MAC
What, honey.

GIRL
The <u>thing</u> daddy, you know the thing.

(She points at a drawer next to MAC. MAC peers at her over his book. She wiggles with excitement. MAC puts his book down, pats his lap)

MAC
Here you go honey. Hop on up.

GIRL
(Reluctantly)
. . .k.

(She climbs into MAC's lap, stares at the drawer. MAC starts to tickle her. She giggles a little, wiggling out of his grasp. MAC tickles her some more. She tries to push his hands away)

GIRL
(Giggling)
Stop it.

(MAC continues tickling. She tries to stop him. The game continues, GIRL protesting with increasing rawness, until finally. . .)

GIRL
(Screaming)
NO, DADDY! THE BOOK!!

(MAC stares at her, mesmerized. Finally, GIRL reaches over to the drawer and pulls out the book herself. It's an Ephemeris. She carefully opens to a page)

GIRL
(Reading)
First contact, 12:01 PM. Totality, 1:35 PM. Length of totality, 2 minutes 54 seconds. That's tomorrow! Tomorrow, daddy!

(MAC stares at her mouth. Suddenly, a huge scream from O.S.)

MOTHER
(Off stage)
DINNEEEEEEEEER!

(Blackout.

Lights up. GIRL kneels in the closet. She plays with two shoes that have washcloths draped around their "shoulders" like robes. GIRL has a different play voice for each shoe)

QUEEN SHOE
Let's go out to the throne room.

KING SHOE
No, you must stay here.
(Jumping squares)
Here, and here.

QUEEN SHOE
In the closet?

KING SHOE
Yes, you must stay in the closet. To protect your head and face.

QUEEN SHOE
Oh dear, there are termites. Everything smells like chewed up wood.

KING SHOE
But it's cool. So cool that it feels wet.

QUEEN SHOE
I think about recirculation. How long does it take to suffocate in a closet? I'd like to let some air in. . .

KING SHOE
. . .but that would be too dangerous.

QUEEN SHOE
Sometimes in my closet I feel frozen. . . If I move one inch I will scrape against a wall. I'll hit my head on the ceiling and all my brains will seep out. O King, whatever shall I do?

KING SHOE
Your closet, Queen, is good for playing Lite-Brite. You arrange the plastic pins in the dark and they shine and shine. You can make up colored patterns. They're lovely in the night-- I'll shut your door down tight.

QUEEN SHOE
But O, will I be safe? Will my face stay on my head?

KING SHOE
Of course, of course. The night will only last this long.
(Measuring a tiny inch with her fingers)
And remember, you must not look in the corners.

QUEEN SHOE
The corners! Where the walls and floor meet squarely. I must not look in the corners.

(The lights dim. Pretty colored patterns light up in the darkness)

GIRL
At night the road is a red and white snake
Inching up the hillside
And clouds sail like galleons
Across the milky sky. . .

(A doorknob rattles. GIRL scrunches up into a ball.

Blackout.

The next day.

Lights up on Mother, scrubbing in yellow rubber gloves. The scrubbing makes a percussive, grating sound.

GIRL enters wearing a no-sleeved shirt. She tries to sneak past MOTHER, who is intent on her scrubbing. She's almost out, when. . .)

MOTHER
Where's your father?!

(GIRL freezes)

MOTHER
What's he doing. Is he SMOKING?

GIRL

I dunno.

MOTHER

You know he SMOKES. He don't even care if he's killing himself. I can SMELL it on his CLOTHES.

(Pause. GIRL starts to leave)

MOTHER

Wait a minute.

(Pause)

Are you wearing that?

(Pause. GIRL shakes her head yes)

MOTHER

Commere then.

(GIRL approaches. MOTHER picks up a pink electric razor. MOTHER grabs GIRL's arm and yanks it up. MOTHER turns on the electric razor, which emits a terrifyingly loud whining noise. MOTHER shaves her daughter's armpit rapidly. GIRL tries hard not to scream)

MOTHER

I'm only doing it for you this once. You have to do it yourself next time.

(MOTHER yanks the cord out of the wall)

MOTHER

Now you're pretty.

(MOTHER exits)

GIRL

Now. . . I'm. . .

(She puts her hands on her face, as if checking to see if it's still there. MAC enters, smoking a cigarette surreptitiously. GIRL watches him. MAC doesn't notice her, though he looks in her direction several times.

Finally, MAC sees her. He puts the cigarette out quickly)

MAC
Don't tell your mother.

(GIRL starts to leave)

MAC
Where are you going? What are you doing?

GIRL
Today's the day, daddy.

(MAC stares. GIRL starts to leave)

MAC
Wait a minute.

GIRL
(Taking a paper from her pocket)
I got my piece of paper.

MAC
You sure do.

GIRL
(Demonstrating)
Prick a pinhole. Look at the shadow. DO NOT look at the sun.

MAC
(Remembering)
Oh! Today's the day? All right, now, don't forget. . .

MAC & GIRL
DO NOT LOOK DIRECTLY AT THE SUN.
YOU'LL GO BLIND.

(Pause. MAC stares at GIRL's mouth. She runs out.

Lights up on the boys in exactly the same spot, doing exactly the same thing, as yesterday. Periodically, JOE scrapes around in the toolbox. After a pause, MAC JR. hurts himself on something)

MAC JR.
Shit! Mother fucker!

JOE
(Digging in the toolbox)
There's somethin' wrong with my eyes. I can't see right.

TOM
Yeah. Too much dope.

MAC JR.
Shut up you fuckin retard.

(GIRL runs in and stops a few feet from JOE)

GIRL
Hey! Hey!

(JOE notices her. He checks to see if the other guys have noticed him noticing her. Then he sidles over)

GIRL
You're missing it.

JOE
Oh yeah?

GIRL
Can't you feel it? The air is heavier. It's definitely happening.

JOE
You're cute. The little sister.

GIRL
It'll be over before you're ready and then you'll have MISSED OUT!

JOE
The little sister got all grown up.

GIRL
DO NOT LOOK DIRECTLY AT IT, see? It's happening right now! Right at this moment! NOW!

(She holds up her paper, looks down at the shadow cast on the ground. JOE leans close to her. He runs his hand slowly down her body)

JOE
Hey big girl. Meet me at the rope swing in a hour.

(JOE lets his hand linger on her breast. . . GIRL is frozen. JOE backs off, and exits. GIRL's hands drift to her face)

GIRL
Do not look directly at it.

(The lights begin to change)

GIRL
First contact. . .

(GIRL starts to rip the paper into tiny bits)

GIRL
First contact, 12:01 PM. A tiny nick appears on the west side of the Sun.

Second contact is totality. . . 1:35 PM.

Five minutes to totality. The sky darkens. The darkness of the sky begins to close in around you. The Moon eats into the Sun.

GIRL (Cont'd)
One minute to totality. The crescent Sun is now a blazing white sliver in a sky filled with stars. Minutes become seconds. The sliver breaks up into beads of light ringing a deep black disk. 10 seconds, 5 seconds-- the beads now fuse into one. Fiery diamond, one. Last dot of sunlight. . .

Disappears, as if it were sucked into an abyss.

Totality.

You are standing in the shadow of the Moon.

(GIRL looks up into the sky.

Lights fade to orange, then black.)

-END-[300]

[300] Slean, ***Eclipse.***

CHAPTER FIVE:
PLAYWRIGHT KI GOTTBERG AND PLAY

Irene showed me the way.

— Ki Gottberg quoted from
Telephone Interview,
9 December, 2005[301]

Although Ki Gottberg and I both attended the Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival in 1991, I did not officially meet her until I interviewed her in person in the fall of 2007. It is likely I saw her at orientation on that first day back in 1991 and maybe I even talked with her if she was at the desk performing her student coordinator duties, but I have no recollection if that was so. The seven-week workshop on the California State University Northridge campus was very large, there were many in attendance, and there was much activity. First year students tended to hang together. Repeat students formed separate bonds. I did, of course, know Gottberg's name as it was printed on our contact sheet and very likely I contacted her for advice when my bicycle was stolen. Over the years, I would see her name now and then in connection with a reading or a production, but since she

[301] Ki Gottberg, Interview by Andréa Onstad, Telephone, 9 December 2005.

lived in Seattle and I rarely perused the theatre scene there, our paths never crossed. In the sixteen years between 1991 and 2007, she developed a visible and respectable West Coast theatre presence, both as a playwright and a theatre educator, enough that she was recommended to me as a possible subject for this study. A brief background will help position her and her work.

Background

Ki Gottberg is a playwright, director, equity actress, producer, and professor of drama at Seattle University, a Jesuit school located in Seattle, Washington, where she has been teaching since 1988, beginning as an adjunct instructor and moving up through the ranks until she reached full professorship in 2007. That same year her dream of having a small theatre was realized. The University built a 150-seat black box theatre near the campus city center which opened in the summer of 2007 complete with all the amenities including an art gallery.

Gottberg has been a guest artist at Centrum in Port Townsend, Washington and a guest artist and teacher at Richard Hugo Literary House in Seattle. She has won numerous awards for her playwriting including an Artist

Trust Fellowship and a prestigious National Endowment for the Arts/Theater Communications Group Playwriting Fellowship that came with a fifteen-month residency at Seattle's New City Theater in 2000 and cinched her tenure at Seattle University. She has had seven play commissions from Seattle Arts, King County Arts, Seattle Rep MOB Show, ACT Theatre Seattle, New City Theater, Seattle International Children's Festival and Empty Space Theatre. Awards include "Best of Fest" New City Theater Playwrights Festival Award, *The Seattle Times* Footlight Award for best new play of 1994, and a U.S. West-La Napoule Foundation three-month playwriting residency in France.

A first generation Seattle, Washington native, Gottberg is of East Indian and German-Jewish descent. Her mixed ethnicity, immigrant parentage, and a shared visual art background drew her to Fornes with whom she felt an immediate kinship. She said she had never met someone whose story was so like her own.[302] A bond developed between the two, a mentorship, which blossomed into friendship.

[302] Gottberg and Slean Interview, 22 September 2007. Unless otherwise noted, all information has been obtained from communication via E-Mail, telephone, or live interview conducted between December 2005 and February 2008.

Gottberg first studied social theory and, like her mentor, studio art, at Fairhaven College, a unique interdisciplinary liberal arts college at Western Washington University in Bellingham, Washington, ninety miles north of Seattle, where students design their own major, self evaluate after each class, and, in lieu of letter grades, receive narrative evaluations. Gottberg received her B.A. in Fine Art and Social Theory in 1980.

After acting in only one show, she entered the Professional Actor Training Program (P.A.T.P.) at the University of Washington, receiving her M.F.A. in 1983. Having come from a non-traditional, non-theatre background, coupled with her ethnic appearance and heritage, Gottberg discovered directors did not know what to do with her. In the summers when all of her colleagues in the Actor Training Program were cast in professional shows (working professional acting jobs was a program requirement), she was always the last to find work. However, when at last she did, she was always cast in interesting and unusual roles. She attributes this to her ethnicity which ultimately led her to non-traditional, avant-garde productions and fueled a personal and growing interest in non-traditional theatre.

Gottberg received her equity card and worked in regional theatres in Seattle and Portland, eventually seeking out New City Theater in Seattle because it did new work, work she describes as generative rather than derivative. She cites her artistic sensibility, her fine art background, her ethnic appearance, and a general disinterest in naturalism as the reasons for drawing her to new work. She became a New City Theater company member and in the spring of 1988 was introduced to the playwriting pedagogy of Maria Irene Fornes in a five-day writing workshop at New City Theater after which Fornes took Gottberg under her wing. Until then, Gottberg had never dreamed of becoming a playwright.

A brief background of New City Theater will help contextualize Ki Gottberg and her work with Fornes and the Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival.

New City Theater

New City Theater is a unique, artist-centered, theatrical organization with no website, no external bureaucratic funding with accompanying censorship requirements, and no advertising in the usual theatre forums (i.e., ***American Theatre***, the ***Dramatists Sourcebook***,

The Dramatists Guild Resource Directory). Despite this unusually low profile, New City Theater has commissioned and produced some of the country's most admired and respected theatre artists--Maria Irene Fornes, Richard Foreman, Wallace Shawn, W. David Hancock, Tony Kushner, novelist Rebecca Brown, and others including Ki Gottberg--mounting shows in places as diverse as Seattle University, a warehouse, the founders' private home, and a host of other improvised spaces. At least one commissioned play, ***Enter the Night***, a play written and directed by Fornes, received its world premier at New City Theater in 1993.

John Kazanjian, a director, who, with his wife, actress Mary Ewald, formed the organization in 1982, has tried "to eliminate any and all possible management work"[303] that keeps him away from the art work itself. A survivor of the cultural wars instigated in 1988 when the National Endowment of the Arts rescinded grants and politics began dictating art, New City Theater keeps no paper archives, no past production files, hosts no elaborate website, in short maintains nothing that does not directly relate to the project at hand. It is a bare bones operation that has

[303] John Kazanjian, E-Mail to Andréa J. Onstad, Subject: ***Here is the E-Mail Hookup to New City***, 24 February 2008.

succeeded for nearly twenty-five years in a hostile arts climate yet continues to create meaningful work.

In 1984, before the collapse of arts funding, Kazanjian's intent was to bring high quality artists to Seattle to work with him and his ensemble. In a series of steps, he planned to initiate the following process:

> Step 1--Stage a published text by the selected playwright and open communication to discuss the text. This step also served to engage myself and the ensemble with the playwright's world.
>
> Step 2--Bring the playwright/director to Seattle to stage a work of her choice with the ensemble.
>
> Step 3--Commission the playwright/director to make a new work and premiere the new play with the New City ensemble.[304]

Kazanjian began the process in 1985 with Maria Irene Fornes's play, ***The Danube***, which he finally produced in 1988.

The Danube, originally titled ***You Can Swim in the Danube, But the Water is Too Cold***, was commissioned and initially presented as a twenty-minute piece at the Theatre for the New City in New York during the Nuclear Freeze Festival in June of 1982.[305] In July of 1982, a forty-five minute version was presented at the Padua Hills Playwrights' Festival and a month later, was remounted at

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[304] Ibid.

[305] Mednick, ed. (***Plays From Padua Hills 1982***), 2.

the Bay Area Playwrights Festival in Marin County, north of San Francisco.

A full-length version of *The Danube* was presented at the Theatre for the New City in New York in February 1983. Fornes thus developed the play through the process of directing three productions, rather than through a series of readings and workshops which is now the norm. Of course, this development of the play through production rather than through readings and workshops all occurred prior to the severe arts funding cutbacks when there was more money available to mount shows, even if only on a lesser scale.

Kazanjian describes first contacting Fornes in 1985, then traveling to New York to meet with her in January of 1986 over dinner at which Murray Mednick and Michael Smith were also present. Finally, as mentioned above, in the spring of 1988, *The Danube* was staged at New City Theater. Kazanjian hired Fornes to lead a five-day writing workshop, which is where Gottberg was first exposed to Fornes's pedagogical style.

Fornes was then scheduled to direct another play in 1989 and decided on *The Conduct of Life*. As Kazanjian tells it:

> We planned for Irene to direct a work in the Spring, 1989. She first chose ***The Conduct of Life*** and I believe auditioned actors at New City in January 1989. So, Irene goes to the airport to return to NYC and reflect on casting possibilities. That same day, when changing planes in Chicago, she calls me to say she would prefer to stage ***Fefu***, runs excitedly through the casting and declares that the New City building environment would be perfect. Since we are artist-centered and work on a project-by-project calendar, I immediately support her passion and off we went. . . .
>
> Irene then decided to stage ***Mud*** in the Spring of 1990 and then the commission premiere, ***Enter the Night*** was staged by Irene in the 1992-93 season.[306]

In February 2008, after long itinerancy, New City Theater obtained a new home, The Shoebox. The Shoebox is a thirty-five-seat performance space housed in a one thousand square foot storefront located at 1404 18th Avenue on the border of Capital Hill and Central District in Seattle proper. The theatre is in the process of returning to multi-disciplinary programming, producing a reading series in which one writer per evening reads from his or her work with no sales, no signings, no question-and-answer-post-read chat, and is reviving its showcase festival for independent artists which disbanded in 1997 due to economic pressures.

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[306] Kazanjian E-Mail, 24 February 2008.

New City Theater was the ensemble company to which Gottberg belonged at the time of her first workshop with Fornes. Further, Fornes chose her to play Emma in the 1989 production of ***Fefu***[307] which Gottberg remembers as "the one that does the sonnet"[308] which permanently cemented their mentor-friendship. Thus New City played a key role in Gottberg's introduction to Fornes and eventually Padua much as Theatre of N.O.T.E. played a pivotal role for Cheryl Slean in her connection to Padua and to Murray Mednick. Both came by way of acting--one through dance and science, the other through art--both arriving at the same place at nearly the same time to create daring, experimental new work unhampered by walls, rules, psychology, or method.

Playwriting Influence

Gottberg's initial exposure to Fornes's work was a production of ***Fefu and Her Friends*** at The Empty Space

[307] There is disagreement as to the date of New City Theater's production of ***Fefu and Her Friends***. Some sources list the date as 1990 (***Conducting a Life***); others do not refer to it (or any West Coast productions) at all. Gottberg, herself does not recall for certain, but in her 13 February 2008 E-Mail says it occurred in 1988. John Kazanjian, who likely best remembers the details as he produced it, believes the year was 1989. For purposes of this dissertation, I am going with that date, 1989, as it seems to correspond best with the Padua attendance Gottberg describes. However, these dates may be incorrect.

[308] Ki Gottberg, E-Mail to Andréa J. Onstad, Subject: ***Question,*** 13 February 2008.

Theatre in Seattle that she saw in 1981 while she was in graduate school. She says she "was blown away by the writing."[309] Her second exposure occurred at the five-day, three-hours per day writing workshop referenced above which John Kazanjian arranged to correspond with the 1988 production of ***The Danube***. The workshop was held at the University of Washington and sponsored by Northwest Playwrights Alliance.[310] Gottberg says she was a complete "novice"[311] in that workshop but Irene "just flipped a switch"[312] for her and was very supportive. The play that resulted, ***What We Are*** (or ***What We Love***), is discussed more fully below.[313]

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[309] Ibid.

[310] Again, these dates are arguable. Gottberg states she attended a workshop in 1987 but that date does not correspond with production dates. The "Teaching and Lecturing (Selected)" section of ***Conducting a Life*** (298), states workshops were held at the Northwest Playwrights Guild in 1987 and 1988 and at New City Theatre [sic] in 1990. It is unclear which date is correct.

[311] Gottberg E-Mail, 13 February 2008.

[312] Ibid.

[313] There is a discrepancy with both the title and date of this play. Gottberg's resume states the play's title as ***What We Are*** but she refers to it in her 9 December 2005 E-Mail as ***What We Love***. Its date of production is listed on her resume as 1987 but in that same E-Mail it is listed as 1988. For the purposes of this dissertation I will be referring to it using both titles and dating it in 1988 as that date fits most logically into the New City Theater-Padua-Fornes-Gottberg conjoined timelines.

The following year, when Fornes auditioned New City actors for ***The Conduct of Life*** in January,[314] Gottberg was among them. As quoted above, before casting was complete, Fornes, on layover in Chicago enroute back to New York City, decided to stage ***Fefu and Her Friends*** instead. Gottberg, cast in the role of Emma, recalls:

> It was a divine production, and Irene was in full flower, even arranging the way I held my finger while sipping tea in a scene. That way of working made some of the actors crazy, especially the super method gals. We were her medium, and she moved us around like paint, light, mud. One had to surrender, and then fill the form she gave to each of us so specifically. It was an exercise in egoless acting for sure! The casting is a dim memory. . . . There were auditions, the well known Seattle actress Marjorie Nelson played Fefu. She was much older than the rest of the cast, which is how Irene saw that play. Irene was incredibly exacting, even ruthless, in her vision. It was thrilling and humbling, as well as maddening to work with her. It took a kind of concentration that left us all wiped out at the end of the day. The costumes were divine. Rose Pederson did them. . . . I know she loved working with Irene. Irene loved the most dramatic textures, colors, shapes. I was in a kind of East Indian salwar kameez deal, and felt glamorous and exotic. It was as if we were every kind of flower, the women in that play, from the wan to the most vibrant.[315]

[314] Kazanjian E-Mail, 24 February 2008.

[315] Gottberg E-Mail, 13 February 2008.

In this metaphoric description of the production, it is evident that Gottberg experienced Fornes's painting influence directly by embodying the role of Emma.

Fornes led a second writing workshop in conjunction with the ***Fefu*** production, this time at New City Theater, which Gottberg again attended. After that production and concurrent writing workshop when Gottberg says Fornes took her under her wing, Fornes encouraged Gottberg to come with her to Padua.

Attending Padua was a major financial commitment covering seven weeks and requiring many logistical arrangements. The following year, 1990, Gottberg won an Artist Trust Fellowship for playwriting which provided the funds allowing her to go. Gottberg had never done anything like it before. She found it very "exciting and fun."[316] It was at this, her first Padua, that she met Cheryl Slean.

Gottberg described her initial experiences with Fornes as tough, unlike Slean's but very much like my own.[317] Fornes even made her cry. Much later, after she knew Fornes personally, she said Fornes told her, "The first thing you wrote was such a piece of shit. My God, it was

[316] Gottberg and Slean Interview, 22 September 2007.

[317] See Chapter Six documenting my experiences.

terrible."[318] Eventually, Gottberg said, she learned to listen carefully while others read, gauging Irene's response, thereby learning from her peers.

Several years after Gottberg attended her first Padua Workshop and Festival, after she had already begun her academic career, married, had a child and was in a somewhat fallow writing period, Fornes told her, "If you don't write, you are the stupidest person in the world."[319] Gottberg said she "felt like a curse was put on her."[320] Fornes, however, was simply exercising a tough love approach to mobilize Gottberg who she believed had talent. To Fornes, nothing mattered but the work. It didn't even matter if the work made money or was ever produced. It only mattered that the work was always being generated. Life and art were one and the same. That ethic was something Fornes passed on to all of her students. Ultimately, Gottberg found this concept liberating. Fortunately, however, she managed to find a way to remain

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[318] Gottberg mimics Irene's high, squeaky voice to perfection, so is able to deliver the whole impact of a Fornes criticism with wit and truth. Gottberg Interview, 9 December 2005.

Fornes, it seems, maintained intense relationships. Gottberg states that Fornes's relationship with John Kazanjian was very fiery, "up and down, up and down." Gottberg and Slean Interview, 22 September 2007.

[319] Gottberg and Slean Interview, 22 September 2007.

[320] Ibid.

economically stable and write even if the work was not being done. Occasional reprimands from Fornes like the one above kept her motivated.

Gottberg attended the 1991 Padua Hills Playwriting Workshop and Festival at Northridge as well, this time on scholarship working as student coordinator. At this point, our lives crossed as that was the year I attended. After this year, Gottberg did not attend Padua as a student again. In 1994, when Padua resumed at Woodbury University after a two-year hiatus, Gottberg attended the Festival only to see the work and to see Fornes.

Gottberg never mentioned another writing teacher from Padua or anywhere else; Fornes was her only mentor. She established a close friendship with Fornes and visited her every year in New York. She describes the mystique of Fornes in this transcription of the 22 September 2007 interview in Seattle:

> . . . Irene was an extremely popular teacher . . . she was always surrounded by this sort of coterie of women who would compete for the territory and you know Irene--she just loved attention . . . she's like a little living goddess in a way to so many of us because of how fun it was to be with her . . . I would just cherish the times when I was in New York where it would just be me and Irene because she was very fun to be with . . .[321]

[321] Ibid.

It was her love of life and magical blend of writing, art, and life in her teaching and her mentoring that drew so many of us to Fornes.

Plays and Playwriting

Gottberg's resume lists authorship of twenty original plays, adaptations, and translations, all of which have had either workshop or full production. All of her plays were influenced, in some way, by Fornes's pedagogy.

What We Are,[322] a play Gottberg wrote in an early Fornes workshop, grew out of a letter writing exercise which she did not describe. I recall, however, an exercise Fornes gave our class in Taxco in which our primary character, or the character that was most on our mind that day, was to write us a letter revealing something we did not know about them but that they wanted us to know. They were also to describe something they wanted very badly.

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[322] As stated previously, in her 9 December 2005 E-Mail, Gottberg states the title of this play is ***What We Love***, and refers to it as attached to the E-Mail which it was not. On her resume, a play titled ***What We Are*** is listed as being produced in 1987, one year before what I believe to be her first writing workshop with Fornes. Dates, thus, are again, uncertain. For purposes of this dissertation, I am referring to the play using both play titles, but referring to the date as the more logical 1988 date, and will leave the unraveling to a future scholar, if such unraveling is even possible.

This may sound simplistic, but it followed after Fornes spoke in depth about characters, speaking about them as if they were real flesh and blood people, completely alive, but bored and frustrated with our clumsy manipulations of them. She said, "When we write only from the brain of the character, we create a disembodied character."[323] It was a very abstract writing exercise. One had to become the character, which was no easy feat. The combination of her talk and the exercise was hypnotic.

Although Gottberg does not describe the exercise she experienced while writing ***What We Are***, it was very likely similar to the one I describe above. Fornes was probably already subconsciously gestating her play, ***Letters to Cuba***, which premiered in 2000 at the Signature Theatre in New York during a retrospective of her work. The play, which evolved out of thirty years' correspondence between Fornes and her brother, highlights the importance of letters and correspondence to Fornes's writing life. It is logical, then, she would fashion exercises out of the activity and teach them while developing her own work.

[323] Onstad (***Taxco***), 61.

Gottberg staged her play, ***What We Love*** (or ***What We Are***), in her house. One can clearly see the Fornes ***Fefu***-staging influence in Gottberg's description:

> The audience moved from room to room, or stood outside looking through windows to see the characters in the play. The final scene, in Mexico, took place in my garage. While I waited with the audience waiting in the driveway, I hit the garage door opener to reveal "Mexico" complete with a tequila bar. After the play finished we all moved into the garage to drink shots. Irene LOVED this ending![324]

Inspired by Fornes and Martha Stewart-esque advice, "Never use your garage for a car, use it for a party,"[325] Gottberg did finally remodel her garage into a tiny, fifteen-seat theatre which she calls The Womb.

In 2005, she premiered ***The Compendium of Nastiness: A Gothic Melodrama for One Performer with Puppets***, in The Womb, lined with red velvet drapes. She made all seven puppets herself. The show ran for eight months. Champagne and cookies were served in her kitchen at 8:00. The one-hour show started at 8:30 and ended with a surprise finale. Her description of that finale is reminiscent of that of ***What We Are***, described above:

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[324] Gottberg E-Mail, 9 December 2005.

[325] Ki Gottberg paraphrasing Martha Stewart. Gottberg Interview, 9 December 2005.

> The finale was me (the sound and lights operator) hitting the automatic garage door opener and "ejecting" the audience into the street.[326]

The show made money for both Gottberg and actress Elizabeth Kenny. Reviews were complimentary, commenting on the unique performance space and quality of production.

Joe Adcock, theater critic for the ***Seattle Post-Intelligencer*** describes ***Compendium*** as an "edifying parable."[327] He wrote:

> ***The Compendium of Nastiness*** goes beyond the seven deadly sins and the 10 Commandments--way beyond. But then, playwright/director/puppet maker Ki Gottberg's little (55-minute) show also is an edifying parable.[328]

Adcock goes on to describe the play as "part action adventure and part gothic romance"[329] in which:

> . . . a disconsolate narrator . . . merges herself into a story teaming with malice, envy, lust, rage, murder, revenge, fanaticism, longing, illusion, incest, bad faith, sadism, terror, sloth, ill-will, deceit, cruelty, abuse of a

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[326] Ki Gottberg, E-Mail to Andréa J. Onstad, Subject: ***Compendium of Nastiness script, etc.***, 25 September 2007.

[327] Joe Adcock, review of ***The Compendium of Nastiness***, "On Stage: Ghastly Deeds Couple with Sinister Comedy," ***Seattle Post-Intelligencer***, 10 January 2006. Available from http://seattlepi.nwsource.com/theater/255009_theater10.html.

[328] Ibid.

[329] Ibid.

> legally controlled substance and, of course, cannibalism--lots of cannibalism.[330]

Adcock then describes actress Elizabeth Kenny playing two dozen characters:

> . . . ranging from a band of boisterous peasants to a gloating demon who talks like Mae West. The peasants are faces affixed to the five fingers of a glove. The demon is Kenny in person. [The] protagonist is Angela, a rag doll with blonde hair. . . . Her main antagonist is her uncle Osmund, a cubist stick puppet. Her Prince Charming. . .is a skinny doll named Hussein, a would-be Arab terrorist.[331]

Gottberg, it seems, following in her mentor's pioneering footsteps, has successfully created her own form of theatre, "garage drama."[332]

Although I did not have the pleasure of seeing ***The Compendium of Nastiness***, I found the reviews and descriptions echoed scholarly critique of early, pre-***Fefu*** Fornesian style. Ross Wetzsteon writes of that early Fornes style:

> . . . her [Fornes's] style prior to ***Fefu*** was blithe, wicked, loonily logical, and anarchically coherent . . . it's as if her earlier style

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[330] Ibid.

[331] Ibid.

[332] Ibid.

> created a fanciful, depersonalized world a level above that of "real life" . . .[333]

In her early plays, Fornes favored music and exaggerated characters, often collaborating with Al Carmines to create "zany, fruitfully illogical"[334] theatrical experiences. These plays were distinctly different from her later naturalistic work.

Phillip Lopate, describing Fornes's ***Molly's Dream***, points out her fascination with early camp during that time, which style bears some resemblance to ***Compendium***'s gothic melodrama, both highly sexualized, exaggerated, bordering on burlesque. Lopate writes:

> . . . ***Molly's Dream*** is set in that twilight of lost women, saloons, and dashing men lifted from Dietrich and Garbo films. The pop camp overtones somehow sharpen rather than cheapen the dramatic confrontation in which Molly the waitress circles around Jim the handsome customer, whose sex appeal is so enormous that five women literally hang on him wherever he goes.[335]

Similarly, Fornes's ***Promenade***, featuring the alluring, buxom, Mae West-inspired Miss Cake literally jumping out of

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[333] Wetzsteon, 34.

[334] Gilman, 1. "Fruitfully illogical," I presume, is essentially the same as "loonily logical."

[335] Phillip Lopate, "Cue the Giant Maraschino," in Robinson, 39-42; originally published in ***The Herald*** (January 23, 1972). (Page citations refer to the Robinson reprinting.)

a cake to composer Al Carmine's bright musical cabaret compositions, especially brings to mind the caricatured cartoon puppet characters in Gottberg's ***Compendium***. Both plays' experimental unrealistic styles resulted in sly, charming, social commentary.

A comparison can also be made between the hyper-theatricality and visual styles of both playwrights with teacher influencing student and student pushing the boundaries of teacher's example. Gottberg said that when Fornes saw her first garage show, Fornes told her, "Oh my God, this is what you should do!"[336] Gottberg took this advice literally and seriously.

At Seattle University, Gottberg's professorial duties include teaching playwriting once a year. Gottberg describes two kinds of students: the drama students taking playwriting to fulfill requirements and the English creative writing students who are "completely in their heads."[337] For these students, she pulls out her full arsenal of Fornes techniques: the visualizations, the physical warm ups (which Gottberg terms, "Yoga for fat

[336] Gottberg Interview, 9 December 2005.

[337] Ibid.

people"[338]). Gottberg believes movement is an excellent teaching tool to get students to stop thinking. Her own actor and artist training taught her to think of the body as a repository for mining visualizations. She explained:

> Where does language come from? Why is the spoken word different? It's the body. Irene is the person who helped me translate my visual experience. Her way of doing spoke to me.[339]

She further explained that it was as if she received permission from Fornes to write. It was the process itself that completely turned her on--the "'Oh my God' of discovery."[340] Now, she says, she does not always warm up her body, she does not always write in longhand, she does not always do what Fornes said she should but, she says, "The approach is with me all the same. It is like being a god, creating from nothing."[341]

When I asked her to comment on the role of Aristotle in the Padua and/or Fornes playwriting pedagogy and how she did or did not apply it to her own teaching, Gottberg replied, "A plot is not part of my experience. Why then

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[338] Ibid.

[339] Ibid.

[340] Ibid.

[341] Ibid.

would I write plays like that?"[342] She believes the split is along gender lines. It is always men who ask her, "Why not a plot?" Their lives," she explained (meaning mens' lives), "are more predictable. Women have to roll with the punches."[343] So many of her students, she said, are constipated, thinking that is how writing has to be. She makes them "put the writing up"[344] (i.e., read aloud) as soon as it's written which creates:

> . . . a flow instead of the constipated impacted ideas of what it's supposed to be. It is better to jump in and swim in the stream than damming it. The ordered life espoused by Aristotelian methods leaves out most of the population. Life does not come ordered. There are lots of reasons to forego that method. It's dead. Plays are boring. Students are bored. They respond to ways of theatre that are messier, closer to the mess of our own lives. Irene's way is a short cut to true voice."[345]

Gottberg noted that the Jesuit priests attending Shakespeare productions at Seattle University often bring along the texts and read along while the play is going. She says:

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[342] Ibid.

[343] Ibid.

[344] Ibid.

[345] Ibid.

> This is not theatre. Theatre has become a museum as opposed to being alive and unpredictable, like life.[346]

Gottberg's primary playwriting pedagogical philosophy is what she terms Fornes's "program of the authentic voice."[347] She religiously follows this program when she teaches playwriting. She explained:

> I teach playwriting every year and I teach playwriting just like Irene taught it. I do it exactly that way. Some of the stuff I picked up at Padua I use, but I stick with the Irene program because the Irene program to me is the program of the authentic voice--the voice that just exists and you need to get out of your own way is what I tell my students. Because everyone's always worried about a plot and they're worried about what is the big point I'm going to make. And of course Irene was such a genius--in it's all in there and you just have to let it come out as opposed to know what it's going to be. The thing that Irene gave me that I hope to give my students is that the creative process is an adventure and an adventure is not an adventure unless you don't know what's going to happen. You've got to be on an adventure. You have to let yourself experience the terror of not knowing what's going to happen.[348]

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[346] Ibid.

[347] Gottberg and Slean Interview, 22 September 2007.

[348] Ibid.

Gottberg's adventure with "authentic voice"[349] is evident in her plays and her teaching and in this way she is carrying on the traditions of her mentor and of Padua.

Analysis of ***The Bride***

Gottberg wrote ***The Bride*** during her second Fornes playwriting workshop which would have been held at New City Theater during the production of ***Fefu and Her Friends*** in 1989.[350] The play was written from a specific exercise for a specific location. Fornes chose it along with several others written in the class for production in an onsite Seattle event called In the Horticul-tural Garden which ran for one weekend in 1989.[351]

Time confusions after several decades can be marred by memories of significant and pivotal events. One such event was Gottberg's marriage May 1988. Whenever I asked her about specific dates of theatrical events she would measure from the date of her wedding, literally counting aloud from

[349] Ibid.

[350] As I have stated earlier, I have not been able to solve the riddle of years as it takes cooperation and rigor with each party and depends greatly on one party's memory and paperwork. Two decades in between past and present does nothing to abate the confusion. Through logic and deduction, I have arrived at the year 1989 as the date for ***The Bride***.

[351] 1988 according to Gottberg's resume. See explanation in prior note.

May 1988. Thus she always refers to ***The Bride*** as written in 1988 though it was more likely 1989.

The title, however, belies its contents. It is not at all what one would expect a new bride to write as it is not about an actual wedding. It is interesting to note that Gottberg's resume reveals she has written two marriage-themed plays, the other being ***The Wedding Night,*** dated 1990, a one-act produced at the Annex Theater in Seattle in 1991 as part of the 20th Century Project.

The Bride is a delicate moment between two men which is neither gender nor sexually driven. Rather, it is dreamlike, set in a Beckettian landscape in which domestic loss and desire are enacted in a playful manner. A bride dream is in fact, re-enacted, which provokes a surreal, Dali-esque mood to the imagery. Karl, dressed in a white dress, walks down a road and meets up with Lou:

KARL
I had a dream.

(Pause)

KARL
I can't get a girl. . .and then I had a dream.

LOU
What kinda dream?

KARL
Well. It's a little strange. I dreamed I was digging in a field. I was turning over earth. A woman, a tiny woman, jumped out of the dirt.

LOU
What kind of a woman?

KARL
Just a woman. Kind of a hag. She was yellin'.

LOU
Jesus.

KARL
I'm tellin' ya'. I could've just woke up, but I was curious.

LOU
So what'd she say?

KARL
"Be a Bride".

LOU
What?

KARL
That's what I said. She said, "You want a wife, be a Bride".

LOU
What the hell.

KARL
So here I am.[352]

I have not seen the play produced but did have two of my 2006 beginning playwriting students with acting training stage it as a script-in-hand, non-rehearsed reading for the

[352] Ki Gottberg, ***The Bride***, Unpublished, 1989, 3-4.

class. From that reading, I discovered I was left with the same melancholy, bittersweet feeling as when I read the play for the first time. There is a sweetness to it that could seem a bird-like mating dance if staged with ornithic intent. Visually it seems to herald Gottberg's SITE Specific play, ***Birdie Come Home***, discussed in the penultimate chapter herein. Both are tales of displacement, sweetness, wonder, and vanished love, which could add up to parables of larger issues of homeland displacement.

Gottberg seems to favor ornithic imagery tied into marriage and/or domicile themes. The opening of ***The Bride*** shows Lou, the older character, appearing crow-like and talking about crows, though his tall, stovepipe hat could also signify groom imagery:

The Bride

by Ki Gottberg

Cast of Characters:

KARL	a younger man
LOU	An older man (who looks like a crow, with a black stovepipe hat)

The play takes place on a road. LOU is already in place as the audience "enters" and stands at the side of the road.

(LOU is alone. He is peering down the road. Looking for something. He is standing. Early a.m.)

LOU
Can't see a damn thing.
(He spits)
Nothing.
(He looks around intently)
Look at them crows.[353]

The Bride exhibits heritage traits from Gottberg's mentor's *A Vietnamese Wedding*, described by Ross Wetzsteon as "one of the most transcendent works of the imagination responding to the war in Southeast Asia."[354] *A Vietnamese Wedding* was created in 1967 for Angry Arts Week, a week-long protest against American involvement in Vietnam. The play, a wedding ceremony, was performed at Washington Square Methodist Church in New York, on February 4, 1967. "An anti-war play that never refers to war,"[355] it contrasted sharply with the other anti-Vietnam war performances and demonstrations including Fornes's own earlier play, *The Red Burning Light*,[356] in that rather than

[353] Ibid., 1.

[354] Wetzsteon, 27.

[355] Kent, 161.

[356] *The Red Burning Light* (1968), described by Lopate as an "agitprop cartoon" (Robinson, 42), was considered by Wetzsteon to be Fornes's "only out-and-out failure" due to "the disparity between the buffoonery of the characters and the destructive consequences of their

espousing rhetoric and anger, it quietly humanized the "other."[357] According to Diane Lynn Moroff, Fornes described the play as a "theatrical experiment."[358]

Richard Gilman, in his introduction to the first edition of ***Promenade and Other Plays by Maria Irene Fornes***, provides further description and gave the play high praise:

> ***A Vietnamese Wedding*** is the play of Irene Fornés that least resembles conventional drama, even of a radical kind, yet it is also the quietest and seemingly most artless of all. Constructed in the form of a reenactment of a traditional Vietnamese betrothal and marriage ceremony, it calls upon members of the audience to participate in its rites, without having to learn any roles or indeed to "act" at all, and upon the rest of the spectators to imagine themselves present at something historical and actual. Yet from this sober summons to reality, so lacking in the superficies of drama, we experience a strange displacement; in imitating an exotic social custom and limning it as though it were an actual event, we find ourselves in the very heart of the country of the dramatic. For theater is the imagining of possible worlds, not the imitation of real ones, and what could be more unreal to us than a ceremony like this play? In enacting it we learn not how other people live but how we are able to imagine ourselves as others, which is what drama is about. If Maria Irene Fornés had given us nothing else, it would be a remarkable

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behavior" which was "too great to be bridged by even the most charming obliviousness." Wetzsteon, 35. Wetzsteon goes on to speculate that it was Fornes's increasing awareness of "puckish irony and music hall playfulness as a response to Vietnam and sexism" that caused her to retreat from writing for a number of years, which period of dormancy led to her pivotal play, ***Fefu and Her Friends,*** written in 1977. Ibid.

[357] Moroff, 24.

[358] Ibid.

> thing to have accomplished. But of course she has given us much more.[359]

While Gottberg's ***The Bride*** differs significantly in content and purpose, it shares similarity with ***A Vietnamese Wedding*** in terms of societal limning, quietly and simply reflecting growing cultural gender awareness and questioning. Assunta Bartolomucci Kent further explains the ultimate significance of such simplicity:

> . . . Fornes created and led a quiet interactive drama, ***Vietnamese Wedding***, in which actors guided audience volunteers in portraying a Vietnamese bride and groom and their families which the remaining audience members observed as wedding guests. Rather than directly protesting U.S. involvement in Vietnam or even war in general, Fornes invited audience/participants to experience "the enemy" engaged in an unfamiliar but comprehensible ritual with universal significance. By having the audience enact the drama, Fornes encouraged them to move beyond cognitive dissonance toward a sort of bodily consonance and communal empathy. This aesthetic/political choice exemplifies Fornes' lifelong interest in rituals of daily life, in the personal tide of individual/societal interaction, and in artistic revelation rather than politics per se.[360]

Gottberg's drama, as well, does not thrust a didactic political message upon the audience but is as simple in its approach. Although hers is not intentionally interactive,

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[359] Gilman, 3.

[360] Kent, 16.

audience members could potentially find themselves inside the site-specific play as spectators standing alongside the road while the dream wedding took place, experiencing directly rather than being told or shown what to experience--an elevating of the well-known writing rule, show don't tell.

Fornes's play was based on an actual myth; Gottberg's on a dream and very likely subconscious thoughts of marriage and wedding ceremonies. Diane Lynn Moroff describes the myth from which Fornes's play evolved:

> The drama, insofar as there is one, is determined by the readers' recounting of a Vietnamese myth, the story of two brothers, Tan and Sung, and Tan's unnamed wife "as a fair white lotus and as fresh as a spring rose."[361] Their triangular relationship . . . is mutually dependent, their fates to their deaths fully entwined. Fornes suggests that their tragedy symbolizes "conjugal and fraternal love"[362] and thus tells an old and familiar story.
>
> Fornes embellishes that familiar story by describing Vietnamese marriage as a process of choosing spouses in terms of economic convenience, according to social standing, education, and moral history, which effectively--particularly in thematic terms--puts the idea of character into quotes. Though the myth of Ta, Sung, and the maiden provides a context for the ceremony, it is ***only*** context; character will be

[361] María Irene Fornés, "A Vietnamese Wedding," in ***The Winter Repertory 2: María Irene Fornés: Promenade & Other Plays***, ed. Michael Feingold (New York: Winter House Ltd. 1971), 12.

[362] Fornés, "A Vietnamese Wedding," 14.

> determined in this event by the participants who fill the context. Fornes literalizes the formative significance of both the spectators' and the actors' input to the theatrical event. Meaning will be wholly dependent on the manner and aura of the participants and their interactions; role, therefore, is stripped of any inherent qualities, underscored as a formal construct alone.[363]

Fornes herself played a role in the production. She played a director who does not direct. She scripted herself into the extremely short, ten-page text, in which stage directions read:

> FLORENCE, REMY, AILENE and IRENE will hold the whistles and noisemakers and use them at the end of the piece.
>
> ***A Vietnamese Wedding*** is not a play. Rehearsals should serve the sole purpose of getting the readers acquainted with the text and the actions of the piece. The four people conducting the piece are hosts to the members of the audience who will enact the wedding, and their behavior should be casual, gracious, and unobtrusive.[364]

Note that Fornes states that ***A Vietnamese Wedding*** is "not a play,"[365] it is an enactment which is, in that way, similar to Gottberg's enactment of a dream.

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[363] Moroff, 24-25.

[364] Fornés, "A Vietnamese Wedding," 8.

[365] Ibid.

It is interesting to note that although Fornes's directing debut is often cited as the New Dramatist Workshop December 5, 1968 production of ***Molly's Dream***, it was the February 4, 1968 Angry Arts

While a comparison of these two plays, *The Bride* and *A Vietnamese Wedding*, may seem at first a stretch because of their obvious differences (performance style, era in which each was written, and the purpose for which each was written), an understanding of these differences leads to an understanding of their inherent similarities. These similarities, then, reveal how the earlier play influenced the later play.

The Bride was written a full twenty years after *A Vietnamese Wedding*. It was not written for political purposes nor was it written expressly for a political presentation. However, the decade of the 1980s, and the end of that decade in particular, was one in which the AIDS crisis hit its peak. The theatrical arena was particularly hard hit. Gay rights were being acknowledged; gay life was visible in a way it never had been before. Although *The Bride* is not a gay play per se, just as *A Vietnamese Wedding* is not an anti-war play, both in their subtle, gentle manner make relevant the foremost issues of the times. This relevance is achieved by purposely avoiding bombastic, didactic, rhetorical language. Both are non-

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Week production of *A Vietnamese Wedding,* eleven months earlier, that actually was her first. This information is gleaned from production descriptions published in *The Winter Repertory 2: María Irene Fornés: Promenade & Other Plays*, previously referenced.

didactic, non-instructional and while Fornes hoped in ***A Vietnamese Wedding*** "to bring home to her audiences the pervasive and unavoidable effect of public policy on private life,"[366] Gottberg illustrated the stirrings of gender and sexual bias and preprogramming, and played delicately with role gendering, and in her quiet way, heralded all that was to come.

While ***A Vietnamese Wedding*** reads more like a ritual, and indeed, Fornes refers to it as such, ***The Bride r***eads like a preparation for a ritual. Both were written for unconventional performance spaces. ***The Bride*** was written for a particular outdoor location and ***A Vietnamese Wedding*** for audience participation. In both cases, the fourth wall was nonexistent. Theoretically, a bystander could have entered into the bridal procession in ***The Bride*** just as anyone could have volunteered to participate in ***A Vietnamese Wedding.*** In both plays, individual creativity and voice are unique, are not tinkered with by outside intervention, and thus belong solely to the playwright. This full ownership of one's work is what Fornes tried to pass on to her students and Gottberg learned so very well. Whether or not Gottberg's work ever reaches the stature of

[366] Kent, 161.

that of her mentor's, it is clear that she has fully learned her mentor's "program of authentic voice" to which she aspires.

The Bride emerged from a specific Fornes exercise. The simple treasure-map-like exercise, much like Fornes's random words and phrases exercises, is designed to jumpstart the imagination and if followed with sincerity and integrity, leads to the treasure--a play based on true individual creativity. Gottberg found the exercise so successful she uses it with her college students at Seattle University. She described it to me as she said she describes it to her students. It is as follows:

> My students warm up, easy Irene style. I give them each a piece of paper and have them write "N," "E" or "W," and "S" (the four directions of which they choose three but they don't know this yet). Then I have them choose a number between 1-100 and write that next to "N." Then a number between 1-50, write that after the next letter, and then again between 1-10 and write that down after their last letter, "S." We then go outside to a central location. Now I tell them the paper they hold in their hands with these directions and numbers is their "map," the numbers are the number of steps they take in each particular direction. They must follow their map, no matter where it takes them. Wherever they end up they must write a play for that location.[367]

[367] Gottberg E-Mail, 9 December 2005.

Since Gottberg shared this exercise with me, I have used it with my beginning playwriting students every year, usually towards the end of the spring semester when the weather is warmer. The results are always interesting and reflect a deepened understanding of place and an expanded idea of theatre. Some became scripted impossibilities as in the case of the student who wrote an ongoing outdoor audience participation show assuming specific participants and featuring a helicopter landing; others included an eco-inspired short play that grew into a longer, more traditional play; and one script, in the performance finale, ended up stuck under the windshield wipers of a car parked alongside the street on which the students performed the play. It is most beneficial if as the culminating exercise, the student scripts are directed and performed by the playwriting students themselves. In this way, students are empowered directly through the experience of scripting the piece outdoors and then working physically in the space with actors to realize the full potential of the site, much as a sculptor works with the actual material after sketching ideas two-dimensionally on paper. The students will also quickly discover the difficulties and/or impossibilities of realizing the script three-dimensionally

as in the case of the student scripting in a random helicopter landing. Working in this manner is a far different experience than working in a controlled pristine indoor environment already set up for performance. Gottberg's pedagogy directly evolved from her studies under Fornes and Padua yet is infused with her own artistic convictions and personality. By continuing to teach the Fornes program and using exercises such as the one described above, she is indeed furthering the Padua/Fornes theatre model.

Following is the full text of the short play, ***The Bride*** that resulted from Gottberg's experience with this Fornes exercise.

The Bride

by Ki Gottberg

Cast of Characters:

KARL — a younger man

LOU — An older man (who looks like a crow, with a black stovepipe hat)

The play takes place on a road. LOU is already in place as the audience "enters" and stands at the side of the road.

(LOU is alone. He is peering down the road. Looking for something. He is standing. Early a.m.)

LOU
Can't see a damn thing.
(He spits)
Nothing.
(He looks around intently)
Look at them crows.

(He hunkers down, looks at the earth under him. Peers down the road. Looks away. Waits.

Pause.

He looks down the road. He sees something, peers, squints)

LOU (Cont'd)
Damn it all.
(He gets a crafty look, a half-smile)
Jesus.

(A figure appears way down the road. It is in white, a dress or nightgown. It moves towards LOU. As it gets closer, we see it is a man wearing a romantic white something. He doesn't move like a woman, or simp. He's just wearing a dress)

LOU (Cont'd)
What the hell.

(As the figure gets closer we see a "normal" looking guy, longer hair. He walks by LOU on the road. He gets past him, LOU watching)

LOU (Cont'd)
Hey.

(The man turns)

LOU (Cont'd)
What you doin' anyway.

KARL
Walkin'.

LOU
Walkin'?
(He checks him out)
I saw you walkin' here the last three days.

KARL
Yeah?

LOU
What you doin'?

(Silence.

Pause)

KARL
You mean the dress?

LOU
You're jokin'. Yeah, the dress. What the hell.

KARL
My name’s Karl.
(Offers his hand)

LOU
(Backing away from his hand)
You some kind of religion? Something like that?

KARL
I'm practicing.

LOU
What the hell. . .

KARL
Being a bride.

LOU
You crazy? What?

KARL
You ever been married?

LOU
Sure. She's dead.

KARL
I want to get married.

LOU
To a woman?

KARL
Yeah to a woman. What'd you think?

LOU
You won't be no bride.

KARL
I had a dream.

(Pause)

KARL
I can't get a girl. . .and then I had a dream.

LOU
What kinda dream?

KARL
Well. It's a little strange. I dreamed I was digging in a field. I was turning over earth. A woman, a tiny woman, jumped out of the dirt.

LOU
What kind of a woman?

KARL
Just a woman. Kind of a hag. She was yellin'.

LOU
Jesus.

KARL
I'm tellin' ya'. I could've just woke up, but I was curious.

LOU
So what'd she say?

KARL
"Be a Bride".

LOU
What?

KARL
That's what I said. She said, "You want a wife, be a Bride".

LOU
What the hell.

KARL
So here I am.

LOU
What the hell. How come you can't get a girl?

KARL
If I knew, would I be doin' this? It just don't happen.

LOU
What do you want a wife for?

KARL
I dunno. Just do. Always have.

LOU
I think you're pissin' in the wind.

KARL
I think it's gonna work.

LOU
What gives you that idea?

KARL
I feel different.

LOU
Huh.

KARL
Last night I went drinkin' and I talked to two girls.

LOU
You shy?

KARL
Kind of. I get confused. I can't tell what they're thinkin'.

LOU
You ain't the only one.

KARL
I think I need a veil.

LOU
Why.

KARL
Just feel it.

LOU
I got a net.

KARL
What kinda net?

LOU
Butterfly. It's kinda like a veil.

KARL
Let me see.

(LOU digs net out of the grass)

KARL
You catch butterflies?

LOU
Once in a while. I like to look at ’em. Somethin’ to do.

KARL
You keep ’em?

LOU
Naw.

KARL
Let me see that. . .
(Takes it)
Yeah, it’s kinda like a veil.

LOU
Put it over your head.

(KARL does)

LOU (Cont’d)
Here.
(LOU turns net so handle is in back)
Sure. That’d work. How's it feel?

KARL
Don't know yet. Gotta walk in it.

LOU
Where to?

KARL
Just down the road. Does it look alright?

LOU
Sure. Looks good. But you don't look like no bride.

KARL
Why not?

LOU
No flowers. Brides always got a bouquet.
(Looks around)
Here.
(He starts picking weeds.

KARL stands watching)

LOU (Cont'd)
My wife's been gone 12 years. She was a terror. A holy terror.
(He's arranging a bouquet tenderly as he speaks)
Oh, she could talk ya' down into the ground.

KARL
What was her name?

LOU
Rose. I called her Rosy. Rosy Rose.

KARL
That's a nice bouquet you're makin'.

LOU
We had a big garden when we had the house. I used to bring her a bouquet Saturday mornings. That's the day she'd stay in bed all day, make me clean.

KARL
Jesus! You had to clean?

LOU
Oh, she could be rough.
(He hands the bouquet to KARL)
What'd you think?

KARL
It's good.

LOU
You're lookin' more like it. Here, I'll put some of these in the net.
(He weaves some flowers in the net)
Yeah. Like that.

KARL
Well. I could be a damn fool.

LOU
Yeah. You could.

KARL
I'll bring the net back on the way back.

LOU
I could follow ya.

KARL
What for?

LOU
I could carry your "train".

KARL
What's a train?

LOU
It's the piece that hangs down in back. Rosie had a 12 footer.

KARL
I don't have one.

LOU
I could hold the handle.

KARL

Alright.

(LOU holds the handle of the net and the two men walk off down the road)

-END-[368]

[368] Ki Gottberg, ***The Bride***, Unpublished, 1989.

CHAPTER SIX:
PLAYWRIGHT ANDRÉA J. ONSTAD AND PLAY

I thought it was Mexico. Maybe it was the beer.

— Andréa J. Onstad, Latin American Writers' Workshop, Taxco, Mexico, 1998 with Maria Irene Fornes

Maria Irene Fornes, Murray Mednick, and the whole of the Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival contributed to my development as a playwright, but each in different ways. As stated previously, I was first exposed to the aesthetic of Padua through playwright John O'Keefe. Although the Padua aesthetic was not my first exposure to theatre, it was certainly my first exposure to theatre that exploded beyond the confines of the proscenium arch and everything remotely akin to a stage. I witnessed O'Keefe's development of various plays he presented at Padua and the Bay Area Playwrights Festival and was privy to many discussions of the art and craft.

While I never attended Padua other than as a student in 1991, I saw much of the work originating there during the mid 1980s when it traveled to the Bay Area. It was in this way that I first met Murray Mednick briefly but memorably at a production of one of his ***Coyote*** plays held

under the Golden Gate Bridge one typically cold and foggy Bay Area summer evening. O'Keefe introduced us and we exchanged pleasantries but that was all. Through his carriage and demeanor Mednick seemed to emanate a shamanistic presence which demanded respect. I recall he wore a Panama-style hat and a serape, a fitting costume for the author of *The Coyote Cycle*. I also recall O'Keefe describing in awe the paces Mednick put his actors through in order to perform the challenging ritualistic piece.

Thus Padua's aesthetic and Mednick's presence influenced what I *thought* about theatre but it was Maria Irene Fornes who influenced *how I wrote* for theatre. It was Fornes I studied with numerous times and at various venues, at first only by chance. I experienced Mednick's playwriting pedagogy only at the 1991 Padua but it must be said that he was not a traveling pedagogue as was Fornes so unless one studied at Padua or lived in Los Angeles and heard of him offering a private class, one would not have accidentally stumbled into a Mednick master class. It is likely that had it not been for this triumvirate, I would never have studied theatre.

Background

I began as a poet, only later branching out into short fiction. I was also a dancer and a visual artist (of some lesser degree than my sister). I had been writing poetry and studying dance for several years when I chanced upon Anna Halprin's Dancers' Workshop in San Francisco the summer before I was to attend Lone Mountain College to complete my undergraduate degree. The Dancers' Workshop was my first exposure to nontraditional dance theatre. I continued studying dance at Lone Mountain, albeit in a more formal fashion, though Ntozoke Shange was in one of my classes and we performed together in one experimental production. I also continued writing.

That fall, at Lone Mountain, my poems as well as my fiction became increasingly visual, so much so that they were almost falling off the page. They seemed to be growing legs, wanting to live beyond their two-dimensional confines. Perhaps they, too, wanted to dance. I was invited to the College of Marin's Writers Conference where I presented my visual poem, "Buncha Dogshit Thisahere" which described the prodigious quantity of dogshit on Haight Street where I lived. The conference attendees were horrified at the simplicity and cartoon quality of my work,

not to mention the subject matter, and refused to publish my piece in their conference publication of presenters' work. This was my first brush with censorship and my first awareness that my aesthetic was other than the norm.

I kept writing pieces that grew more and more visual--I cut one poem's words out of colored paper, put them in a paper packet and "performed" the poem by spilling it out onto the floor. My preference for experimental absurdism was set after I was exposed to the French Avant Garde and in particular, Alfred Jarry's ***Ubu Roi***. I created a skit in which the actors wore sandwich boards outlined with exaggerated nude body shapes complete with balloon breasts and phalluses. They carried a cardboard suitcase which contained colored paper clothes. The actors performed by reading their lines pinned to the sandwich boards. Unlike the shunned "Buncha Dogshit Thisahere," ***From Out Of The Suitcase*** found a home and was published in Richard Kostelanetz's ***Third Assembling: A Collection of Otherwise Unpublishable Manuscripts***, in its original illustrated form which in no way resembled an ordinary script.

After graduating, I continued to write and study dance. The combination of art forms I worked in parallels the early artistic experiences of Gottberg and Slean and it

is likely that this blend of language and movement, the influence of numerous visual artists in my life, and to some degree, happenstance, contributed to my interest in theatre. Had I relied only on my forsaken brush with theatre in High School where my impressionist waves painted for the set of ***H.M.S. Pinafore*** were redone by the school's realist painters, the Schultz sisters, at the request of the English teacher who directed the abysmal production, I would have scoffed at anyone suggesting I might have even the most vague interest in the art.

Playwriting Influence

I first encountered Maria Irene Fornes, "Mother Avant Garde,"[369] by accident. I had heard about Sam Shepard's monologue workshops, knew he taught at the Bay Area Playwrights Festival, so, encouraged by O'Keefe, decided to attend the 1982 Festival held at Tamalpais High School in Mill Valley with the intent of signing up for his class. Monologues were just coming into vogue then, akin to the current 10-minute play fad, and Sam Shepard was considered the best. But Shepard was already famous and no longer

[369] Aishah Rahman, "Introduction," ***NuMuse: An Anthology of New Plays from Brown University*** 6; available from http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Literary Arts/NuMuse/intro00.html; Internet; accessed 24 September 2005.

teaching. A brief glimpse of him leaving the parking lot on his motorcycle was the closest I would get to the Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright.

Instead, I found myself in a class taught by a weird, crabby-looking, frizzy-haired woman with a distinctive, squeaky voice that belied the stern overall impression and the fire in her eyes. There must have been thirty of us crammed into the grim green and gray classroom outfitted with orange plastic chairs, reminiscent of a third world airport waiting room.

I will never forget that first writing exercise. We were to write the sound of the wind, simply the sound. We were to write for several minutes (maybe it was seconds), never taking our pencil from the paper, not concerning ourselves with punctuation or perfection. Joyfully I wrote for, child of the 60's, I was raised on this type of extemporaneous expression. I cannot recall exactly how it turned out--probably something like this:

> shshsssshhhhhhhhhhZHhhhhhhshhhhhmmmslhhhs
> hlll shll shhaaaaaasssssssshhmhssshaaaaaa

After Fornes determined enough time had elapsed for us to finish the exercise, we each read out loud, in turn. When I read, quite confident I wrote something maybe not

remarkable but certainly "correct," I did not receive the praise I expected. In fact, I did not receive any praise at all. What I received was a lashing. I no longer remember her exact words but I do recall a feeling of shock rushing over me, followed by anger. I had done the exercise as she directed, read it well, what could possibly be wrong? How did one please this woman? And who was she anyway? It would take me years to figure that out.

Several students spoke to me afterwards. They had noticed the criticism, did not agree with it, and wanted to voice their support. I knew, then, I wasn't simply being hypersensitive. I shrugged off the experience, determined to enjoy the rest of the Festival.

I did enjoy the plays, though Fornes's ***The Danube***, inspired by a collection of Hungarian language records she found at a garage sale and performed on a platform in a grove of coastal California Live Oaks under which smoke pots smoldered, left me baffled. I found myself confused and disinterested in the haze-obliterated actors perched on a platform beneath the trees, wearing goggles and speaking words I could not understand. The Festival highlights, in my opinion, were John O'Keefe's ***Bercilak's Dream*** and Murray Mednick's ***Coyote V: Listening to Old Nan***a, both eclipsing

everything else at that year's Festival by embracing mythic and visual qualities I had never before witnessed in live theatre. *Bercilak's Dream* so integrated landscape, movement, visual, and language it was reviewed by then *San Francisco Chronicle* art critic, Thomas Albright.

I did not encounter Fornes again for another eight years, almost long enough to forget that first experience. I certainly did not seek her out. This next time was at the first West Coast Playwrights' summer workshop. West Coast Playwrights was an offshoot of the Bay Area Playwrights Festival which had established its headquarters in a private high school in San Francisco's Haight Ashbury district.

Though attendance was down, Fornes's class was popular and much better attended than most, including the one taught by Tony Kushner, who had not yet attained his present status. In the morning we met in the theatre where she conducted physical exercises which I thought were a bit silly. I still thought of her as an odd, middle-aged lady, something of an eccentric. Nevertheless, we all followed her in simple Yoga poses and the rest of the morning went by without incident.

In the afternoon we reconvened in a bright classroom, sun shining through the window--unusual for a San Francisco summer day. There were many Latina/os in the class, Cherríe Moraga sitting not far from me on my left, Octavio Solis somewhere in the mix. Cherríe's *Shadow of a Man* would soon be directed by Fornes, her mentor, and Octavio would emerge as the premier Bay Area Latino voice. But none of this had happened yet. There was excitement in the air. My thoughts briefly flew back to that previous experience but I disregarded them. I had just graduated from the Iowa Playwrights Workshop. I was tough. And I was confident.

Fornes began an exercise in which we were to write *in* to something, explore the interior of that something, penetrating, going deep within as if to discover its very soul. I still remember the fun I had, scribbling frantically, trying to keep up with the thoughts coming through my pencil, the joy I felt as if I were a fly on the wall, experiencing it all. I was excited to read, but after I finished, Fornes launched into a brutal, humiliating diatribe. It seems I had not penetrated the substance, had skirted the outside and though I remember nothing of Fornes's specific remarks, having tunnel-

visioned my way through the experience in order to maintain composure, I recall a feeling of vicious disregard for my writing, fit only for the trash can and frankly, I wondered if my Nordic presence was perhaps a contributing factor. Fresh from Los Angeles, a new play under my belt that was garnering attention, residencies lined up for the winter, I was not intimidated. I still had not experienced Fornes's teaching in the way that I had been told to expect and wondered what all the hoopla was about.[370]

It took some time but I finally realized Fornes was right. I indeed had ***not*** gone into the substance but explored every inch of its outer surface. I later understood that working from the outside in was definitely ***not*** Fornes's approach to playwriting. It was, however, the way she approached directing.

My third encounter with Fornes was just a few years later at the 1991 Padua Hills Workshop and Festival. As mentioned earlier, attending Padua was a major financial commitment. An arts grant from the Marin County Buck Trust

[370] Paula Weston Solano, in ***Conducting a Life***, describes her own terror of reading in a Fornes workshop after the person reading before her received harsh criticism prompting a Fornes pet peeve lecture. Solano describes the moments before reading, and even during reading wherein she stopped and confessed to complete intimidation, in graphic and humorous detail. Although she felt she embodied all of Fornes's pet peeves, she was surprised that Fornes treated her kindly and felt her writing was true. Delgado and Svich, 224-226.

and a television writer friend's generous contribution helped. I recall having to negotiate a series of seemingly impossible logistics including subletting my apartment for part of the time to a boyfriend (which turned out to be a judgment error), arranging and paying for a friend-in-need to feed my cat--another judgment error, but worst of all, quitting my job which I then had to woo back on return because I was broke. My plan was to keep track of all the writing exercises at the workshop, write them down exactly with as much detail as possible including how I felt doing them, my evaluation of their success or lack thereof, which I did. As in times past, the invited artists taught on a rotating basis. Fornes was the first to teach and I determined to keep a very low profile, way below radar range.

Fornes's class was packed. As in her class I attended at the Bay Area Playwrights' Festival, there must have been thirty, maybe more, of us in the room. Many were actors who followed her around and simply wanted to learn everything about the way she worked. I didn't expect much. I was looking forward to David Henry Hwang and some of the other artists who would be teaching later. Fornes's class was just a hurdle.

My notebook entry dated June 25, 1991 notes the title of her first lesson as "Learning How to Create life."[371] Fornes took her time dropping us into the alpha state, starting first with physical exercises after which she talked about the crippling things that happen to writers. Then, quiet. We were to imagine a time from our past, before we were 12 years old, when we or someone else put something unpleasant in our mouths. We were to let the images take shape, seeing, hearing, and smelling them and all the details round them, the more the better. And then we were to draw what we saw, writing in the areas that needed explanation. Now and then she inserted a line. I wrote several down: "He is very tall and strong." "Why didn't you eat anything?" Then we were to insert an action; then an object, a shoe. She also said that none of the suggestions needed to be used. At the end, she said the purpose of the exercise was to try and find other levels, other connections we might not have otherwise realized.

Some read. I did not. Fornes did not comment. We began another exercise. We drew each other's faces. We were to draw the faces with extreme detail, as if we were

[371] Onstad (*Padua*), 1.

making a map. We took the initials of our subject's real name and made up a new name. Then we broke for lunch.

On our return, Fornes led us in more Yoga-style exercises after which we put our drawings on the seats of our chairs and walked around, looking at them. We were instructed to look at them until one of them grabbed us, not because it was better drawn but because it "spoke to us." We did this several times before we chose one and brought it back to our seats at which point we were to close our eyes and "see" our chosen portrait come to life.

Perhaps because time seemed limitless and we were not harried or perhaps because it was the first day of the seven-week workshop and none of us knew each other so there was no history of favoritism or negative criticism floating in the air and surely because the alpha hypnotic state had been achieved, my picture, that of a man, came alive, literally alive, before me. He came up to me, talked to me. Crazy as it sounds, he sang a Paul Anka song to me, which one I cannot recall. It was both beautiful and frightening and so real I was afraid and banished the conjured image.

We were then instructed to draw what we saw. Every ten minutes Fornes threw in a line or a suggestion, the

words evolving from the picture. The exercise took almost two hours. It was exhausting but worth the effort. My character lived! I had created life! I thought about that writing experience for years after, never quite achieving that state again.

Fornes went on to talk about writing as a state of slight hypnosis. She read a little of her own self-described "unsuccessful attempt" at Christopher Columbus having tried to apply it to something already in the works, which she felt did not work. She talked about the exercises as ways to bring oneself to another level, of tricking oneself, of thinking/not thinking, the words and phrases a means into oneself, like a fresh person entering a conversation. She described how details lead to richer writing and injecting foreign elements into a scene can result in exciting discovery.

The second day was much the same, productive but extremely tiring. I did not read and do not recall if anyone did. I did not have another experience where my character came alive. I wanted very much to talk to her about that experience but my previous years' rather unpleasant encounters with her prevented me from doing so. She did not teach any more in those seven weeks.

Mednick's class occurred a little later in the session. I no longer remember exactly when but believe he taught last in the rotation of invited artists. He demanded attention, respect, active intelligence, and ultimate concentration in his classes which he conducted as one would imagine a Shaman teaching apprentices. I recall our first class meeting, sitting outside in cheap plastic classroom chairs, spines straight and at attention when a minor earthquake hit. Mednick simply sat there with the slightest smile noticing our brief collective panic. We were to sit and continue watching, listening, with the deepest respect, no matter what.

Mednick was serious and quickly rid classes of anyone who was not. Some would not return after experiencing the first introduction to severity. In some ways, his approach was terrifying and mirrored Fornes's demand for humility. In an era where cuteness and individualism were rewarded, where any attempt to create was considered brilliant and artistic, Padua teachers, and Mednick and Fornes in particular, did not bullshit nor did they tolerate bullshit. They did not waste anyone's time. Mednick's criticism was as swift and cutting as Fornes's.

Every Saturday morning, students presented their work. At the first Saturday student reading, one returning student presented a stereotypical play beginning with the clichéd "Knock knock. Who's there? John. Come in" routine, presenting it seriously, not as parody or even juxtaposed with theatricality or anything approximating creativity. Mednick hit the roof. He demanded to know how she (the student) could possibly write such crap, and how, after all the classes she had taken at Padua, she could not understand theatricality, etc., etc., etc. I cannot even remember the entire diatribe, so horrified I was, for I had not yet presented and had never witnessed such an explosion in a classroom. Needless to say, I was terrified to present, but when I did, I was lauded for my "brilliant and creative mind" which, unlike my sentiments for Fornes, forever endeared Mednick to me but did nothing for my relations with the other students.

For Mednick, theatre is language before spectacle; learning to hear from the stage, mandatory. His listening exercises--listening to the space, listening to one another and repeating exactly, word-for-word, what was said, and his listening and recording the interior of the body--an exercise that lasted three hours with the pen or pencil

never leaving the paper except to turn the page--all resulted in a deep and physical connection to the actual life of writing. I was privileged to experience this exercise at the end of which I was left with the distinct sensation that words literally come from one's deepest tissues, travel down the arm, through the fingertips and spill out through the writing instrument, the words themselves, blood droplets. My writing was never again the same. I have since conducted this exercise at the University of San Francisco for my graduate students in the Drama Workshop where I had a four-hour block of class time. Students reported having the same resulting sensation. I conducted a shortened version for one of my seventy-five minute classes at the University of Missouri-Columbia with a lesser result, though several found themselves opening up in their writing in ways they had not yet experienced. I concluded that the time element as well as a certain pre-existing dedication to the art and craft of writing is crucial to the success of this exercise. It cannot be introduced casually, nor should it be given to an uncommitted, immature class.

At Padua, I wrote so much with such intense focus, writing became a way of thinking. Watching an evening

performance was like entering that world of words, connecting to the personal writer within as well as the actual writer, collaborating with the manifestation onstage by knowing and anticipating the words as the actor performed. One evening, after helping the aging Carol Channing who had come to watch a particular actor, to her seat and taking the one next to her so as to keep on eye on her, I found myself falling into the play just as I described above. The play was Mednick's ***Heads.***[372] I still cannot get over the sensation of entering the play ***as a writer*** while the play was ongoing. It was as if my imagination was immediately manifesting itself onstage by merely thinking of the words. My imagination was bypassing the page and creating life onstage. The play, indeed, became a living entity. It has not happened to me since. The connection to the source of writing, the interiority of writing rather than the exteriority--i.e., the sham, the hack--became, after that and after experiencing the three-hour body writing exercise, utterly obvious. Anything deviating from that source, immediately suspect.

[372] Students customarily attended all the performances, not just once, but every performance of every play. And not just the plays they were assisting. If one lived on the campus I did, the immersion, then, was total, the result being a shifting of perspective and ordinary reality, which I suspect was the underlying purpose.

I longed to return to Padua and in a following year was accepted as an intern but was unable to coordinate all the financial and logistical aspects needed to pull it off. Thus I never again experienced Mednick's teaching or the Shangri-La of Padua playwrights writing and directing their own work without encumbrance from other theatre personnel. I did, however, have the opportunity to take another Fornes workshop.

In 1998 I was invited to participate in the two-week long Latin America Writers' Workshop. This workshop was held on the magnificent ex-Hacienda El Chorilla, a campus of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) in Taxco, Mexico. Here I encountered a different, softer Fornes, her hair longer, curled under. She laughed more and was much more accessible. I thought it was Mexico. Maybe it was the beer. By this time I had become more interested in fiction and was taking both her class and Steven Dobyns's class. I hadn't expected to find impetus for my playwriting as the fire had been dying out in me for some time. I latched onto Dobyns's exercises and quickly sketched out several stories. Fornes's class, meanwhile, was meeting in the school's sculpture studio, a particularly appropriate location. We would walk through

the lush foliage past fallen statues, figures leaning against walls, bougainvillea bowing low, weaving its vines through the broken clay.

There were very few of us; I do not recall the exact number. Again, I chose to keep a low profile. I was in the fiction class so playwriting was not my only outlet. Within a very short time however, perhaps it was the second day, my memory is faulty, Fornes conducted an exercise that managed to revive my interest in the genre.

She began the session by talking:

> An artist needs to watch and do nothing. Writers create life, painters create form and physical space. The most beautiful scenes [in a play] are when they [the characters] are relaxed and communicating. The audiences who always have to "get it" are ruining the theatre and ruining young playwrights.[373]

She went on to describe Chekhov's plays as representative of real drama, a collection of moments in characters' lives rather than scene after scene of one character always wanting something and that some moments are simply silent. She said:

> The objective of one character always wanting something from someone else is killing theatre. Can you think of anything more American? Life is not about constantly getting something from

[373] Onstad (*Taxco*), 29.

> someone. If that is what yours is about, you need help.[374]

I am not sure how the exercise began, perhaps it was by visualizing our play, but the essence was about keeping in touch with the physicality of our character. After we clearly saw our characters, we were to draw what we saw as Irene interjected phrases: "They didn't give me the right kind of saucer." "Don't make me look at you." "I waited and waited." "I was going to buy this house." "I would have bought you that shirt." "These hands held you." "I want to touch your hands." "You used to dress differently." The exercise continued. When we got stuck, we were to draw and we would draw until the words predominated. We drew and wrote for what seemed like hours after which the relationship between two of my characters, a mother and her son, was firmly established.

Another exercise, one that would prove to be the most effective and definitive solution to the problems I was having writing my play, was a simple letter my character wrote to me about what he really wanted. By this time, I thought I understood Fornes's technique and believed it was primarily her lead-in--dropping us into an alpha state

[374] Ibid.

thereby hypnotizing us--that was so effective. In her lead-in, she talked about talent. "Talent is daydreaming or the act of daydreaming," she said, then launched into a story about a man who watched a puddle evaporate by people walking through it. "Spacing out helps to be in touch. You must train your subconscious to collaborate with you and do the work. When we write only for the brain of the character we create a disembodied character."[375]

So, we "spaced out" and began to write, Fornes interjecting her famous off-the-cuff phrases: "I waited for an hour." "It happened a few years ago." "There is an odd feeling this isn't private." My letter wrote itself. From it, I discovered not only the identity of my character but a very detailed description of a shirt he really wanted. Both revelations shocked me. The detailed description of the shirt and my character's strong desire to own it became a pivotal moment in my play. The exercise had truly opened my subconscious, revealing a depth that connected him to the others in the play in a way I would never have discovered though creating biographies, writing outlines, plotting crises, denouement, catharsis.

[375] Ibid., 60.

When I have since attempted this exercise in the beginning playwriting classroom, it often does not succeed because of the necessity for the writer to become the character, an abstraction that beginning playwrights who are not actors do not seem to comprehend. Other factors could be class length and grade pressure in academic settings, neither of which contributes to the true concentration and deep subconscious thought required in doing this exercise.

The following day Fornes discussed how to portray tragedy without being indulgent. "Tragic versus whining,"[376] she called it. She advised us to take out everything in our plays that contained the sound of asking others to help.

> If a character lies back and complains, something needs to happen to change. This is not necessarily in the lines but in the mind of the character. So we must go into the mind of the character and find the suffering. There are two categories of suffering: the passive whiner and the active sufferer who will do something or actively not accept the situation as permanent.[377]

The exercise she devised was of a introducing a new writer, a different writer, who comes to help. The writer could be any kind of writer--a textbook writer, for

[376] Ibid., 65.

[377] Ibid., 65-66.

instance. We wrote a name down on a piece of paper and passed it several times. On the paper we wound up with, we wrote a description of what kind of writer this person was. And then we drew the writer.

My writer was named John Ellis, who wrote computer textbooks for a living and on the side wrote comic books illustrated in black and white. He suggested I turn my character, Sam, into a black and white two-dimensional cartoon.

When the exercise ended, I read aloud for the first time since my previous humiliations. This time Fornes listened. I took the opportunity to tell her of the time at Padua when my character came alive as a result of her exercises. My experience interested her a great deal. I finally had her attention but this time, I no longer craved it. I had my play. I also had my fiction.

When I returned to my room I finished the act. I finished the play a few years later. The ideas sparked in Taxco were so combustible the play became one play in a trilogy. The act written in Mexico still seems to me to be the freshest moment in the whole play. It came directly out of that Nowhere Land of my subconscious and rings of the truth Fornes and Mednick so passionately believed. The

following excerpt from my notebook was a direct result of these exercises:

SAM
Oh Mama! Your hands!

MOTHER
Don't touch my hands!

SAM
Your hands are covered with spots!

MOTHER
You can't touch my hands!

SAM
Please Mama!

(MOTHER holds out her hand)

SAM
Mama! Those spots! I don't remember spots on your hands. Are they freckles? You never had freckles. Your skin was milky white. Oh Mama! Dios mio! They look just like the dots on the curtains!

MOTHER
Oh Son. These are not freckles & the curtains are not dotted. They are simply little "o's" of perpetual surprise.

SAM
Perpetual surprise?

MOTHER
I decorate everything in little "o's." I like to be perpetually surprised.

SAM
Oh Mama. I didn't know. Please let me touch.

MOTHER
Oh no. Your finger would go right through.

SAM
Oh Mama. Like the marks of Jesus.

MOTHER
Son. I was not that holy.

SAM
Was, Mama? Was?

MOTHER
Yes. Was.[378]

Throughout the two weeks of the Latin American Writers' Workshop, we'd all meet in the bar with Fornes and drink Micheladas[379] for hours. We'd laugh, we'd cry. And then we'd laugh some more. It was the most delightful writing experience I have ever had. Whatever had hampered me from enjoying Fornes and fully experiencing her exercises had vanished.[380]

I long to take another Fornes or Mednick workshop. Only through their magic have I been able to dig deeply into a character's mind. I try the exercises on my students but find the university, the grading rubric, the bureaucracy, an atmosphere too thick to allow the gossamer of subconscious thought to penetrate. There is no time to

[378] Andréa J. Onstad, ***Joe's Bar***, excerpt, 2000.

[379] Beer, tequila, and lime juice, in a cold, salted-rim glass.

[380] At this Workshop, I was cast in a reading of Fornes's newest play. I cannot remember the name of it--indeed it might not have yet been named--but a glance at her oeuvre list suggests it must have been ***The Audition***. In any case, after the reading, she determined my role should be cut.

daydream and daydreaming is the key to writing. Yet, I try, and sometimes I see a glimmering of truth in the writing that evolves from these exercises. I try to explain the methods to my students, but most simply want the answers, the key, the conflict, the plot, all of which are so antithetical to her approach. Fornes and Mednick work from the inside out, a longer messier process, but one that assures quality and originality. I think back over the twenty years of influence they have had on my work and realize the debt I owe them. I cherish the time I had with them--even the bad times--and hope I can somehow give to others what I learned from them about writing.

Following is Act 2 of ***Joe's Bar***, the second play in a trilogy on music and how it affects our lives that directly resulted from the last Fornes workshop. The rest of the play as well as the other two plays in the trilogy, owe much to Fornes, Mednick, and all of the Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival artists. ***Joe's Bar*** received a staged reading at Theatre of N.O.T.E.'s NOTEworthy Reading Series in 2004. It was directed by Rebecca Gray (who told me I had written something magical) and considered for their upcoming season.

Joe’s Bar

a full-length play

by Andréa J. Onstad

Act 2
Horse Opera

Scene 1
My Baby Loves the Western Movies

(The following is a movie/dream sequence that can be staged, filmed, cartooned, puppeted, shadowplayed or even rolled, like a filmstrip, frame-by-frame, between two large rollers. It can be silent & subtitled or in full audio. However it is portrayed, & there are many possibilities, the only requirement is that it be in black & white.

Michael Nesmith’s "Tumbling Tumbleweeds" plays as scenes of the desert roll by. Then the title shot:

HORSE OPERA
Starring Sam Spender
& his horse Dusty)

Scene A

(SAM rides his horse, DUSTY. They amble along in the sagebrush & cactus. SAM looks down at his shirt)

SAM
Dios mio, Dusty! I must have a nueva camisa!!
Giddyup!!
Ayiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii!!

(He gallops away. Fade out)

Scene B

(SAM gallops into a sleepy western town, yelling, shooting both guns. TOWNSPEOPLE run & hide. He stops at a western store that has an extremely tasteless & unattractive western-style shirt hanging in the window. He dismounts, ties DUSTY to the hitching post, hitches up his pants & enters the store)

Scene C

(Cut to inside the store. SAM threatens the STOREKEEPER, played by the actor who plays Johnny, with his gun & points to the shirt in the window)

SAM
Geeve me that camisa or I shoot your meeserable tiny head bloody & eet rolls onto the ground & wobbles there een the dirt.

STOREKEEPER
Senor! Senor!

SAM
Ahora! Move! Vamoose!

STOREKEEPER
But Senor! Es imposible!
Esta camisa is too horible!

(SAM shoots the STOREKEEPER. The storekeeper dies a dramatic death. . .)

STOREKEEPER
Ayiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii!!

(. . .while SAM takes the shirt from the window, puts it on & admires himself in the mirror)

SAM

Ah, si. Now I look like a meellion bucks.

Scene D

(SAM walks dusty slowly through the chaparral. He is singing)

SAM

(Singing to the tune of "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean")

Mi madre lies over the ocean
Mi madre lies over the sea
Mi madre lies over the ocean
Please bring back mi madre to me
Bring back
Bring back
Bring back mi madre to me to me
Bring back
Bring back
Bring back mi madre to me

Scene E

(Fade to night. A campfire. SAM sits with a cup, talks to his horse & weeps)

SAM

Oh Dios mio, Dusty.
I meess mi madre so much.
I want to see mi madre.
I want her to see my new shirt.
She would like eet so much.
Oh Dusty.
I will never see mi madre again in thees life.
Until we lie side-by-side in the cemetery.
Oh Dusty.
Mi madre, she was an angel.

Scene F

(SAM sleeps & dreams a dream within a dream.

SAM's MOTHER, played by the actress who plays Jimmie Lee, stands by the kitchen sink, an angel in a long white nightgown that floats in the breeze blowing in from the open window framed by a polka dotted curtain. SAM appears in the doorway, looking at her)

SAM
Mama! Mama!

MOTHER
Sam. I've waited & waited for you & now you've come.

SAM
Oh Mama.

MOTHER
Sam. That shirt. It's horrible.

SAM
But Mama!

MOTHER
It's okay for a baby. . .

SAM
I had one just like it, remember?

MOTHER
. . .but a grown man. . .

SAM
Don't you remember, Mama?
My sixth birthday?

MOTHER
. . .a grown man looks better in something a little more conservative. Let me dry my hands. I will find something of your father's.

SAM
Oh Mama! Your hands!

MOTHER
Don't touch my hands!

SAM
Your hands are covered with spots!

MOTHER
You can't touch my hands!

SAM
Please Mama!

(Close up of hand as she holds it out)

SAM
Mama! Those spots! I don't remember spots on your hands. Are they freckles? You never had freckles. Your skin was milky white. Oh Mama! Dios mio! They look just like the dots on the curtains!

MOTHER
Oh Son. These are not freckles & the curtains are not dotted. They are simply little "o's" of perpetual surprise.

SAM
Perpetual surprise?

MOTHER
I decorate everything in little "o's." I like to be perpetually surprised.

SAM
Oh Mama. I didn't know.
Please let me touch.

MOTHER
Oh no. Your finger would go right through.

SAM
Oh Mama. Like the marks of Jesus.

MOTHER
Son. I was not that holy.

SAM
Was, Mama? Was?

MOTHER
Yes. Was.

SAM
But you've kept the house so nice. It looks real.

MOTHER
It needs painting.
On the outside.

SAM
& Joe?

MOTHER
He still guards the door.

SAM
I didn't hear him when I came in. He used to bark.

MOTHER
I had him stuffed & taped his bark.
Would you like me to play it for you?

SAM
Oh yes, Mama!

(She plays a tape of a dog barking.
Close up of SAM crying)

SAM (Cont'd)
Oh Mama. Remember how we used to ride around in the truck with Joe in the back? Remember how his ears blew in the wind? Joe. He was such a good dog. Oh Mama.

Mama. I have a horse now. A real horse.

MOTHER
Well, I suggest you get him stuffed, Son.
The sooner the better. They're best that way.
Less of a problem.

(A horse neighs)

SAM
Mama?

MOTHER
Yes Son?

SAM
Where's Daddy?

MOTHER
You know Daddy's dead, Son.

SAM
But so are you, Mama.
& so is Joe.

MOTHER
But I'm alive in your dreams.
& so is Joe.
You never knew Daddy.
He could never be alive in your mind.

SAM
I'm going to get you a big satellite dish, Mama.
So you can look for Daddy.

(Willie Nelson’s "Mamas Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up To Be Cowboys" begins to play)

SAM
Listen. Do you hear that song, Mama?

MOTHER
What song?

SAM
It's coming through the window. Listen.

MOTHER
No, Son. I don't hear any song.

SAM
Mama, I'm going to get you that satellite dish.

MOTHER
Just don't get it the same way you got that shirt.
I don't like that, Son.
I didn't raise you that way.

SAM
But Mama. How did you know how I got this shirt?

MOTHER
Oh, I almost forgot. I was going to get you one of your father's shirts. I'll do that. Right now.

(MOTHER dissolves)

SAM
Mama, don't go! Don't go!

(Cut to SAM awakening by the cold campfire. It is still dark. He tears at his shirt, ripping it. It hangs in shreds on his body. He weeps. DUSTY nuzzles against him & neighs. SAM tapes the neighs. Fade out)

Scene G

(Cut to a long shot of SAM riding through the chaparral desert. Marty Robbins' "El Paso" plays)

SAM
Cora! Cora! Cora!
Yo quiero mi yellow rose of Tejas,
Mi amore, Cora!

(Shot of a lone farmhouse. The FARMER, played by the actor who plays Johnny, is by the well. SAM rides up to the farmhouse)

SAM
Donde esta Cora's Cantina?

FARMER
Ayiiii. Meester. Cuidado.
Cora's Cantina is very dangeroso.
Ayiiiiii. Don't go to Cora's Cantina.

SAM
Tell me where is Cora's Cantina or I shoot your head bloody & eet rolls off your neck & into thees filthy dirt.

FARMER
Ayiiii.
Cora's Cantina ees over there.
Een Mexico.

SAM
Een Mexico? I thought eet was in Tejas. Okay you little peece of sheet. I don't shoot your head off thees time. Maybe next.

(Long shot of SAM riding off into the sunset as the music continues to play)

SAM
Cora! Cora! Cora!

Scene H

(Cut to Cora's Cantina. CORA is dancing with BIG JESSE. SAM bursts into the cantina)

SAM
What ees thees?
Do I have to kill you to get you out of thees horse opera or what?

BIG JESSE
Yes. You will have to kill me.
But if you kill me you kill yourself.

SAM
What do you mean by that, hombre?
Don't you geeve me no cowboy hocus pocus.

(SAM pulls out his guns)

CORA
Don't shoot!

BIG JESSE
Hey hey hey. Chill out big fella.
We're all amigos here.
One big happy family.
Ain't we Cora.

(BIG JESSE & CORA continue dancing.
They do not stop)

CORA
Si. One big happy family.

BIG JESSE
See? Here's mi madre. . .

(Enter JIMMIE LEE. She looks just like
SAM's mother in his dream. She wears
the same clothes)

SAM
Hey! That's mi madre tambien!
Mama! Mama!
Show me your hands.

JIMMIE LEE
Where did you get that awful shirt, Son.
Did you steal it?
Come on. Tell me.

SAM
Your hands have freckles!

JIMMIE LEE
Don't touch my hands!

SAM
They're Jesus' hands!

(Close up of JIMMIE LEE's hands)

JIMMIE LEE
(Looking at her hands, bewildered)
Jesus hands?

BIG JESSE
(Regressing)
Look Mama! He's got a horse!

(Cut to horse outside window blurring to toy horse)

BIG JESSE
& a hat & a vest & boots. . .

JIMMIE LEE
Tell me, where did you get these things.
Tell me! Tell me!

(Close up of SAM looking out window)

SAM
Joe! Joe! Joe!
Where is my Joe?

JIMMIE LEE
He's right here, honey.
I had him stuffed.

SAM
But he used to talk to me.

JIMMIE LEE
He'll still talk to you.
I taped his bark.

(Close up of SAM outside of dream starting to wake up)

SAM
(Mumbling to himself in his dream)
Something's wrong here.
Didn't I just dream this?
Mama. Donde esta mi padre?

JIMMIE LEE
Please, Son. Stop talking like that.
You aren't a Mexican.

SAM
Please Mama. Just answer me.
Donde esta mi padre?

JIMMIE LEE
He's right there, honey.
In that picture.
Holding his heart.

SAM
That's Jesus, Mama.

JIMMIE LEE
No, it's your father, Son.
I pasted his picture over Jesus' face.
& there he is. Your father.

SAM
Oh Mama, Mama.
I'm going to get you out of here, Mama.

(BIG JESSE pulls out his guns, pulls CORA to his side)

BIG JESSE
Nobody's going anywhere.

(Close up of JIMMIE LEE as BIG JESSE shoots both her & the Jesus picture of daddy. Close up of stuffed dog as he shoots it, stuffing flying everywhere. Close up of SAM, close up of gun)

BIG JESSE
It's between you & me now, Sam.

(LITTLE JESSE runs through, running between BIG JESSE & SAM)

LITTLE JESSE
Mama! Mama! Mama!

BIG JESSE
There's a river of blood running through us.
Go ahead.
Go after him.
It's your life.

(BIG JESSE cocks his gun. SAM starts to reach for his)

BIG JESSE
Don't move.

(They both fire. They both die extravagant, dramatic deaths.

CORA tears her hair & runs back & forth between the two)

CORA
Ayiiiiiiii!
Oh Dios mio! Dios mio!

("The End" scrolls across the screen. Willie Nelson's "Mamas Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up To Be Cowboys" plays as the credits roll)

Scene 2
Hung Over

(Joe's bar. SAM stirs & groans)

JOE
Sam! Wake up Sam!
What'd you do? Black out from that stout?

SAM
(Groaning)
I dunno Joe
I just had the damnedest black & white dream
It seems it all started
With me riding my horse
I guess it was more of an opera of sorts
A horse opera, a western

SAM (Cont'd)
A shoot-em-up drama
The good part was
No talk in rhyme
I mean it's okay some of the time
But that brief relief
Made me realize the grief
It puts me through
Just to speak to you
Gives me a headache
Yeah, it was a nice break

Hey where's the music?
Where are the folks?
Did they all go
Or are you playing a joke?

JOE
The jukebox is all ready
To go for a spin
The folks
I don't know
They were just here
Having a beer

SAM
Well I gotta go see a man about a horse

JOE
Of course

(SAM exits)

JOE
(To audience)
Just look at him stagger
Should have given him lager

Well folks
I'm through telling jokes
It's time you stand up & stretch
& come up here & catch
A drink or two
Take a break
While we wait
For old Sam & his fate

JOE (Cont'd)
& while the stools are all empty
& the beer is still cold
Just 10 minutes or so
Then you all can go
Back to your seats
To watch the end of this feat
(To cast offstage)
Hey all you actors
Made up in Max Factor
I know you must hate it
But I sure would appreciate
If you'd not be blokes
& come out meet the folks
They'd love you to mingle
& I'll buy you each a single
Drink if that helps you decide
(To audience)
Can't say I ain't tried

End Act 2

Interlude

(Joe's Bar. JOE tends for audience & cast, all except SAM.

Music medley)

CHAPTER SEVEN:
SITE SPECIFIC FESTIVAL AND PLAYS

> Hosting this Playwrights Festival is a dream [I have] held dear since [my] days at Padua Hills in L.A. with Cheryl Slean.
>
> — Ki Gottberg, Artist Biography, SITE Specific program[381]

While searching for a seamless denouement that would neatly demonstrate how the Padua and Fornes/Mednick legacy lived on, furthering the state of dramatic art, I received a serendipitous email from Cheryl Slean. She and Ki Gottberg were considering co-producing a site specific festival in Seattle based on the Padua model--something they had wanted to do since their student days at Padua. Would I want to come? As soon as the dates were set, Fridays and Saturdays, September 7 though 22, I booked my ticket and made arrangements to attend both shows on the final weekend, September 21 and 22, 2007.

The SITE Specific Theatre Festival

Gottberg and Slean titled the festival SITE Specific--SITE an acronym for Seattle Indie Theatre Experiment,

[381] Ki Gottberg, "Artist Biography," SITE Specific Program, 2007, 5.

extending by inference the already prevalent trend in independent film production into the realm of theatre. It was to be held outdoors on the grounds of Seattle University, just as the Padua festivals were presented on various California campus locations from 1978 through 1995. Attendees purchased tickets at Lee Center for the Arts, the recently-completed facility on the Seattle University campus, complete with an art gallery. Lee Center for the Arts Gallery was the gathering place for all attendees from which they were led to the various site specific performance areas on the campus.

My "date" for the Friday evening performance was my nephew, Demian Elliott, who lives in Seattle. He had been a Padua child actor and had performed with Jesse Shepard, Sam and O-lan's son, circa 1981-1984. After parking, we were misdirected and found ourselves at what appeared to be one of the play sites, complete with chairs but no audience. In the damp Seattle drizzle, we waited for a bit but no other audience members showed so we bumbled about until we spied several folks carrying umbrellas and heading in one direction. We followed them and found ourselves in the Lee Gallery.

Panic ensued as I discovered we'd arrived late, our tickets given away! It was only a thirty-nine seat house and the show was sold out. We explained we were misdirected and without clear signage initially found ourselves in what turned out to be the third play site, the site of Slean's play. At first, my pleas fell on deaf ears but then, Slean arrived, recognized me, and acknowledged my predicament. Traveling several thousand miles to attend the show as dissertation research only to be turned back was not an option. She found extra chairs.

My chair, squeezed into the middle of the second row, faced a set of long glass windows, the street, 12th Avenue, visible through the glass. Behind me, the spare gallery show was hung under luminous modern lights. The newly varnished hardwood floor gleamed. I was torn between taking notes or taking in the sensuality of the long, narrow, new, and very tasteful room. Before I had time to decide which to do, Slean and Gottberg were in front of us, Gottberg in her signature baby blue, round-toed cowboy boots and Slean dressed in tree trunk brown heralding the costuming of her own play.

In their shared introduction to the evening's program, they explained how SITE Specific had evolved out of the

Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival model and a long-time desire to emulate Padua in a festival of their own making. They paid tribute to their mentors, Murray Mednick and Maria Irene Fornes and the other Padua artists and teachers who strongly influenced their work. They also pointed out the differences between Padua and SITE Specific: Padua's reliance on nontraditional, environmental sites for performances evolved out of necessity. SITE Specific outside performance areas were intentionally nontraditional. Four SITE Specific sites on the Seattle campus were chosen and approved and by mid-August, the place names were written on pieces of paper and put in a hat out of which the invited playwrights plucked what would be the determinant site of their play. The similarity to Fornes's writing exercise was no mere coincidence. The play would then be written specifically for that site and, hopefully, inspired by that site.

These four sites were approved by the campus authorities and consisted of the art gallery (the single indoor site, though arguably 12th Avenue was partially used, thus making it a combination indoor/outdoor site), an outdoor, slightly claustrophobic and somewhat enclosed area with much foliage next to a circular building above which a

parking garage loomed, a wooded outdoor area near the reflecting pool and a parking area partially obscured by a building allegedly a chapel, and another outdoor area in which a large tree dominated the performance area with lush mature bushes prominent. Slean and Gottberg explained that off-limits were such intriguing areas as the reflecting pool itself and a luxurious fountain near the fourth site.

Slean and Gottberg expressed hope that the Festival would become an annual event, that they would add classes including a puppetry class, thus extending the scope of the Festival. This lack of primary focus on pedagogy was another way in which SITE Specific differed from Padua. Several months later, I was informed that SITE Specific had indeed secured funding for another year but it was not yet certain what would be the composition of the Festival and whether or not this funding would provide for classes.

SITE Specific differed, too, in that it lacked the strong community element so essential to Mednick's Padua wherein students, teachers, artists, actors, all lived and worked together for, by the end of its existence, seven weeks. This type of communal base places emphasis on the collaborative aspect of theatre by focusing on the necessity of creating community regardless of the sometimes

natural inhibition and solitary preference of many writers in particular. This emphasis also encouraged those privately inclined to socialize and, ultimately, through forced and necessary interaction, helped them produce and for some, successfully market, their work.

The Plays

Towards the end of Slean and Gottberg's introductory speech, there appeared to be some hubbub outside which I ignored, thinking it was street distraction. I was fortunate to see all the shows a second time, for it was only after the second viewing that I realized the first show really began during this distraction.

Birdie Come Home, by Ki Gottberg, again utilizing ornithic imagery, was an imaginatively staged, highly theatrical fable in which a nest laments the loss of her bird. The ruckus outside the window that on first viewing I dismissed, was Birdie traipsing up 12th Avenue in all her finery--hat and cape of lush layers, flimsy and feathery, a very plump and bouncy bottom, long spindly legs tightly encased in black and ending in tiny pointy feet, the composite of which was reminiscent of a healthy, full-bodied bird, as indeed was its purpose. Further intrusion

came from a poorly-dressed tramp peering in the window, which again, on first viewing, I presumed was simply a curious street person looking in at us. I later found the tramp was written into the script and a Festival mascot of sorts.

The novel staging, the clever utilization of both inside and outside--street and stage juxtaposed--challenged the notion of the observer and the observed as is demonstrated by the tramp looking in at the audience who are look out at him. The extensive use of visual elements including the hilarious and charming but nonrealistic costuming, pointed towards a very sophisticated artistic creator. The reunion between the cozy-looking Nest and the fluttering, feathered Birdie was the crux of the short play. With much reference to what constitutes happiness including Birdie's quip to the audience: "I am her bird of happiness. Her 'blue' bird of happiness. Gone Wrong,"[382] the twenty-minute play ends with the two exiting, "Birdie snuggling into Nest, while Nest elaborates on more details of her true happiness."[383]

True to Padua tradition, none of the plays were easily understood as they did not operate realistically. Gottberg

[382] Ki Gottberg, ***Birdie Come Home***, Unpublished play, 2007, 7.

[383] Ibid.

especially seems to have embodied her mentor's artistic visual eye as ***Birdie Come Home*** was the most imaginatively conceived and most creatively utilized theatrical elements. Gottberg's interest in color, costume, arrangement, and composition were clearly visible as she staged her play appropriately in an art gallery as if on a canvas, just as her mentor, Fornes, was famous for creating elaborate stage pictures when directing her own plays. The outside beginning scene framed naturally by the window casement could have easily been mistaken for a large painting. The Fornes influence was also clearly apparent in the elliptical, not quite metaphorical, story, which unfolded moment-by-moment rather than through traditional conflict and drama.

At the end of ***Birdie Come Home***, ushers instructed the audience to follow them to an outdoor location to see the second play on the program, ***H-O-R-S-E***, by Kristen Kosmas, cofounder of the Obie-award winning Little Theatre in New York. Seattle drizzle had eased and we enjoyed a comfortable but cool excursion to the next site, following the usher's flashlight beams, winding down steps and through gardens. When we finally reached the site, we were given paper towels to wipe down damp chairs. I later

learned that the biggest reason for the thirty-nine maximum seating capacity was the dearth of available chairs. Ushers had to rush from one site to the next, moving and setting them up.

This second site had a medieval quality, slightly Rapunzel-like, with a squat, round tower situated in a hollow surrounded by dense foliage. High above loomed a vine-covered parking garage which was to prove vital to the final scene.

Despite this final scene, of all the plays, ***H-O-R-S-E***, structurally a monologue, seemed the least organically tied to site. A young girl spoke directly to the audience, again in the elliptical and elusive Padua manner, saying over and over, "I'm not allowed to tell you but . . ." with the expected "but" exposed, which structural conceit grew tiresome quickly. The monologue seemed to go on and on without arc except at one point, a strange man emerged from the building. The next night, I realized it was the same man who had peered in at the audience at the beginning of ***Birdie Come Home***. During my second viewing, I further realized the man appeared randomly throughout the evening in all the plays and seemed to provide a kind of visual but inexplicable throughline to the Festival though no

explanation was ever provided. My questions regarding the man's random appearance were met only with chuckles. From that response, I assumed it was either an in-joke of some type or one of those happy but irrational theatrical accidents.

H-O-R-S-E ended by finally utilizing the site. First, the sound of honking from the garage high above, which I thought was unscripted until it became pervasive, was followed by flashing car lights, and then a car driving slowly out of the parking lot, with the driver calling down to the young monologist. The slightly creepy, oppressive feeling of both the space and the ghostlike car reminded me, atmospherically, of a Stephen King movie. However, the atmospheric potential was never utilized which left me unfulfilled. Throughout the play it seemed always as if something were about to happen. But it never did. There was nothing about the piece for me to grasp--no recognizable occurrence, situation, symbol, metaphor, nor even traditional story with conflict, climax, or closure. The actress simply exited by climbing steps to the waiting car and that was that. The lack of metaphor or symbol pointing at deeper truth underscored the fact that the author was not Padua-trained. It was apparent that the

playwright was unfamiliar with the idea of interacting with environment and utilizing language and site effectively to evoke mood and create story. The play did not need the site nor did the site need the play. Except for the ending--ascending the staircase to the waiting car--the play could have been performed anywhere. It was an excellent example of why a pedagogical element is so important in creating a festival based on common principles. Pedagogy helps define and explore principles.

After ***H-O-R-S-E*** ended, we were led across campus to the site Demian and I had first happened upon--the slightly wooded area near the reflecting pool and next to a parking lot with the nearby building I later learned was a chapel though in the dark that was not at first apparent. This area was the location of Slean's play, ***Sanctuary***, which heralded and made full use of the site.

By this time, night was upon us. Torches were lit. The mood of the site was grim devastation. The site reminded me of war movies that take place in the future after the entire world has been devastated. And, in fact, this futuristic devastation was the premise of the play, which took in 2040, a time of permanent war. The setting was in a cemetery next to a chapel. A mix of futuristic

and tattered contemporary costuming which my memory conjures up in sepia tones, gave an eerie effect. As the audience entered, again, a certain hubbub permeated the atmosphere. An actor wearing a kilt was in a tree and seemed to be eating something. Others were rushing about with torches though it was unclear whether they were actors and part of the play or ushers catering to audience comfort--a familiar Padua element from long-night performances. A disconnected feel, the brown monotones, the dark night sky, the bleakness, the weak light of the torches, created a sense of foreboding. When the play began and the kilted actor dropped from the tree, I immediately recognized the influence of Murray Mednick's ***Coyote Cycle***. Slean had always said she longed to quote that first opening moment of that first ***Coyote Cycle*** play she saw so many years before that so moved her and changed her life.[384] Finally, she did.

Just as Fornes's influence was clearly apparent in Gottberg's ***Birdie Come Home***, Mednick's influence is obvious throughout ***Sanctuary***. Mednick's emphasis in his classes on the poetry of language manifests in ***Sanctuary***. The dialogue was beautifully and carefully crafted. Innuendos

[384] Gottberg and Slean Interview, 22 September 2007.

about the current war and political situation were rife. A starving Stew, the kilted character, searched for his grandfather's grave in an unmarked cemetery. The actor playing Stew crawled and wove through the audience, at one point, directly under my foot. Two other characters, futuristic cops, Mike and Burns, male and female respectively, Burns in goggles, patrolled the cemetery searching for terrorists. When confronted by these cops who supposed him a terrorist, Stew admitted to eating raw food and sleeping in his car. He explained that his grandfather, a Marine, was killed in the Iraq war. This revelation was the first definite clue we were given that the play took place in the future. The references to the current war as if in the past created a deep gloom and promoted extreme discomfort and anxiety. Past, present, future, all blended together in an uncomfortable "stew," no pun intended. Like ***Eclipse***, this play seemed to be about watching, waiting, and hope in the face of certain doom. Burns embodied this theme when she asks Stew:

> What is it you're looking for anyway, peace? Some kind of sanctuary? Well eventually you'll have to come out my friend, out from the shade of your hopeful god, and deal with life as a mortal. What happens when the past is the past and the

> future is nothing but this? The slow decay of your body. Your rank and certain demise.[385]

Near the end of ***Sanctuary***, the roving mascot man, now dressed in a trench coat, passed by on the sidewalk, glanced at the audience and continued walking. Again, until I saw this repeated the second night, I did not realize his appearance was staged. ***Sanctuary*** ended and we were ushered into the night to a heavily foliaged site, a large tree clearly the center focal point.

The last play of the Festival, ***Transpiration***, written by Vincent Delaney, multi-award winning playwright, took place in what I imagined as a futuristic Garden of Eden. Just as ***Sanctuary*** was a commentary on war, ***Transpiration*** was a commentary on the state of the environment. The large tree stood center in a lush garden. Two botanists, one male, one female, in white Hazmat suits entered like moonwalkers. Until the dialogue began, I thought it possible these white-suited characters were astronauts. Again futuristic, the play took place in a time when walking in nature wearing normal clothes had long passed. The natural environment had become so polluted and toxic one could not enter it without full protection.

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[385] Cheryl Slean, ***Sanctuary***, Unpublished, 20.

As with the other three plays, this play was evocative in mood and feeling, yet not specific, lacking a suggested but never realized dramatic arc. All the plays established moments and mood and elicited thought and sensual response in varying degrees, just as did Padua plays. Focus was on immediacy, ritual, and moment-to-moment experience.

The phantom man made his final appearance at the end of *Transpiration*. He emerged from the bushes, having been hiding there all along, revealing himself as a kind of answer, though answer to what was not clear. A potential murder seemed to have taken place--though that, too, was unclear, and it could have been surmised that he was responsible. Again, as with the other plays, *Transpiration* was strong on mood but hinted at plot. As with H-O-R-S-E, the author was not Padua-trained. It seemed as if the author partially wanted to write a murder mystery but was reluctant to commit to that decision. Mood and site, however, were more effectively explored than in H-O-R-S-E.

When the evening ended, Demian and I met Slean at a local café, Café Presse, where martinis were the preferred drink. We made arrangements to meet the next day prior to performance for a taped, live interview with both Gottberg and Slean after which we would see the plays a second time.

I purposely did not seek out reviews of the SITE Specific Festival prior to attending, but later, I read well-known theatre critic Misha Berson's, review in ***The Seattle Times***, and discovered my thoughts regarding the individual plays aligned, generally, with hers, particularly concerning the production of ***H-O-R-S-E*** which she called a "slapdash effort,"[386] ". . . tiresome,"[387] that "unlike other entries in this interesting new mini-fest, . . . could have been performed anywhere."[388] Slean's play received a high five for best achieving the site specific effort: "Of all the plays, Slean's ***Sanctuary*** interacts with its setting most affectingly."[389] And she cited Gottberg's work as a "droll hoot,"[390] paying special heed to the costumes designed by Harmony J. K. Arnold as "impressive pieces of textile art."[391]

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[386] Misha Berson, "Open Air Plays Blend Into Settings," review of SITE (Seattle Indie Theatre Experiment) Specific Festival, The Seattle Times, 14 September 2007; available from http://archives.seattletimes.nwsource.com/cgi-bin/texis.cgi/web/vortex/display?slug=site14&date=20070914, Internet, accessed 30 September 2007.

[387] Ibid.

[388] Ibid.

[389] Ibid.

[390] Ibid.

[391] Ibid.

Berson termed the site specific work "diverting exercises in so-called 'eco-theater,'"[392] a term which conjures images of rafting the Amazon, climbing the Himalayas, and other exotic outdoor adventures. I am not convinced Padua and SITE Specific Festival efforts constitute the more derivative writing that would be termed 'eco-theater' as that term suggests adventurous social realism with perhaps a tinge of cultural criticism tossed in for effect. These plays do not fit the social realism category; cultural criticism possibly. Nonetheless, I had never encountered the term until reading this review and it gave me pause. Perhaps Berson was simply highlighting the premise that these plays explored natural outdoor sites as places where theatre could take place and nothing more. She also enclosed the term in quotations without attributing authorship which suggests a newly minted catch-phrase that will likely reappear. In addition to this review, Berson published a promotional piece about the Festival and two other productions titled, "Offbeat Theatrics March to Own Rhythm" in ***The Seattle Times***.[393]

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[392] Ibid.

[393] Misha Berson, "Offbeat Theatrics March to Own Rhythm" ***The Seattle Times***, 7 September 2007; available from http://archives.seattletimes.nwsource.com/cgi-

Other than these two articles, I found no other journalistic references.

The Interview

I met with Slean and Gottberg in the Lee Gallery at 5:00 p.m., Saturday, September 22, 2007. It was an uncharacteristically pleasant, sunny Seattle day, though I am told clear, fall days are a well-kept secret in the Pacific Northwest. The gardens of Seattle University were neon green and blooming; the sunlight streamed in, reflecting off the wood floor, enveloping us in a warm glow.

Slean and Gottberg were eager to talk about their favorite theatre subjects: Padua, Fornes, and Mednick. Though much of what they told me I had already gleaned from several years' worth of emails and telephone calls and incorporated into the body of this work, they did also address their SITE Specific collaboration specifically.

Nothing compares to live interview with its visceral, visual dramatic effects. I was not disappointed, even though the interview was interrupted numerous times with friends, audience, actors entering with questions,

bin/texis.cgi/web/vortex/display?slug=dram07&date=200709107, Internet, accessed 30 September 2007.

problems, etc. Gottberg is as flamboyant in real life as she is over the telephone, showcasing her performance and mimicking abilities. Slean is composed, assured, and as articulate as I remembered her.

A rousing discussion ensued concerning Fornes, Mednick, Padua, and Gottberg and Slean's artistic backgrounds complete with such humorous physical demonstrations I lamented I had not come equipped with a video camera. When I asked them directly why they produced the SITE Specific Festival at this particular time and in this particular place, with playwrights directing their own new, generative work, Gottberg responded vehemently that the reason was to "Stop the readings!"[394] She continued:

> Why not take a chance on the vision? . . . That was why we wanted playwrights who were willing to direct their own work which Irene was so adamant about that and I tell that to my students--empower yourself--do not just be someone who sits waiting for somebody else to give vision to what you saw--do it yourself. So why not make a festival that gets rid of this whole cult of the director. Oh my god. When I saw some of the nightmare things they did to my plays . . . and playwrights think I'm just here to serve their vision--it's like--what?--it's backwards . . . Irene was such a stickler about that--and to me that was so liberating because I was coming out of this theatre training program where you were always dealing with these directors who were

[394] Gottberg and Slean Interview, 22 September 2007.

> interpretive artists they were not generative artists.[395]

Ownership and control of playwright vision became a focal point of discussion for the next several minutes. This concern was the essential reason for the Festival, which like its progenitor, placed the playwright and the playwright's generative vision first, ahead of the interpretive artists. The discussion raised issues that were not easily resolved.

Slean wondered aloud why it always seemed to be directors running theatres as artistic directors and not playwrights. Though both Padua and SITE Specific were and are playwright-driven entities, the playwright leadership composed of differing personalities, they are an anomaly. No answer to Slean's question was forthcoming.

Gottberg, coming from a performance background, offered this position:

> Of course, it's fun when there's a lot of cooks there can be a lot of fun things that happen and certainly I have worked as an actor with directors who had fabulous vision but for new work, for what playwrights are . . . trying to do, it doesn't make sense that the playwright would always be sitting back off waiting for the director to notice their raised hand back in the corner, it makes sense that the playwright would

[395] Ibid.

> be right in the moment with the actors but playwrights--a lot of them tend to be shy.[396]

Slean then stated that often playwrights want to be alone in their room, writing all day, which explanation seems to mesh with the prevailing stereotype. Gottberg pointed out that Fornes was different, more social, which was why she (Gottberg) was drawn to the Fornes method:

> That was what was so great about Irene. Her whole deal was why would you sit alone? Why not be with the people? Why not have some fun? For me, because I had been a visual artist and I hated the alone aspect of it--being in rehearsal to me was heaven and still is. Rehearsal is where the action is. I mean, once the show is running, well, there's that kind of accolade, but it's not nearly as fun as what happens in rehearsal in my estimation so when Irene was teaching these workshops where you literally were passing around notes where . . . you'd get an idea from the person next to you suddenly it looked like, well you're not alone--there's this whole pool of creativity and to hear that same idea again and again in the students' reading . . . something like a glass of water--something amazing with such diversity--the pool of creativity we make as a group is very exciting and I think Irene, because she told me it was just torture for her to sit alone and write. She'd rather do anything else. She loved to hobnob.[397]

Slean, defending her primary mentor and possibly alluding to her own preference, countered:

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[396] Ibid.

[397] Ibid.

> Not all of the Padua playwrights were like that. Some of them were very uncomfortable directing. Including Murray. He's now got somebody else directing all of his work. Because he doesn't really like to deal with actors. He's an interior kind of person and he doesn't like working with the egos of actors and like Irene, he wants actors to be very precise about their delivery and their physical presence on stage and it's just a frustrating process for him so he's found a director guy that he trusts and he's passed it all on to him.[398]

To which Gottberg replied:

> That was such an amazing thing about Irene. She enjoyed messing with actors and she enjoyed getting into why it should be her way because when I was in ***Fefu*** there were a couple of Method-oriented actors in that cast and oh my god there was one actress who hated Irene because Irene was in her face all the time. [Mimicking] "No. No. No. You must put your finger like this like this no no it wasn't uplifted sit on the edge no the edge of the chair I'm telling you the edge," she'd be just yelling at you and it would so much where you had to work from the outside in instead of the inside out and you had to find a way to justify these unbelievably specific ideas that she had about how it should look but I found that to be thrilling because literally you were on the bone of her vision and so to find out why you're literally sitting on an edge of a chair with your pinky upraised you had to find a reason to do that.[399]

Slean then offered this final, essential Padua insight:

> That's why there was a Padua company of actors that came again and again because they had to be

[398] Ibid.

[399] Ibid.

> able to work that way and they had to be able to work with the language so that the language became a primary energetic--it was as important as any sort of intention or emotionality was how the language came out of your mouth and the energy and the force or whatever of that and it's really hard to get Method or psychologically trained actors to work that way. It's almost impossible.[400]

This conversation could have continued indefinitely but it was time to get ready for the show. It was apparent that regardless of the reason they created and produced SITE Specific, Gottberg and Slean were indeed passing the torch handed them by their mentors and continuing the tradition of playwright-led, generative theatre by producing this Festival. Despite increased economic and political restraints, they had forged ahead and produced their own version of Padua, having to forego many of the extras that were common in more fortunate times: the classes, the company, the community, the extended process.

My nephew and I again watched all four shows, Demian reminiscing more and more about his youth, telling how he and Jesse escaped the adults one night, drawn by the neon sign of a fast food restaurant far in the distance, likely leaving out salient elements of the adventure. His stories lent a very different flair to the theatrical history of

[400] Ibid.

Padua. It occurred to me as he talked, that Padua had also meant "coming-of-age" for the attendees' children, who, like the adults, experienced Padua as more than a mere annual event. For both, it was, is, and will always be, a state of mind--a memory of a time of unburdened creative freedom in a theatre Shangri-La.

The Festival ended with a cast and crew party at Gottberg's house to which we were invited. I looked forward to getting a glimpse of the Womb Theatre but was not afforded that opportunity. The house, perched high on a Seattle hill, blended into the trees foliage and seemed, like a Padua play site, enhancing rather than overpowering the environment. Gottberg and Slean presided over the drawings for the SITE Specific raffle, set up to help pay actors and crew, after which we left. The next day, I returned to Missouri.

Conclusion

Both Gottberg and Slean inherited from Fornes and Mednick a fierce Off-Off Broadway entrepreneurial attitude towards theatre, an all-hands approach that has served them well in mounting their own work under all sorts of circumstances, in all sorts of venues, undaunted by

bureaucratic theatrical rejections. Perhaps because their plays have always come to life, they do not see writing and production as separate but as two necessary parts of an art form. Thus, the idea of production is not an impossible "thing" that cannot be accomplished. Production, for them, is a given for they simply find a way to do it themselves and maintain total artistic vision.

The SITE Specific Festival embodied this free-spirited attitude and despite the ravages of time on economics, these two playwrights are doggedly continuing the belief in Padua-inspired, playwright-driven theatre instilled in them by their mentors. It is unfortunate more of this work is not available for the public. One thirty-nine seat and one fifteen seat theatre on the West Coast can only produce so many plays. Nevertheless, that is not a reason to give up and they have not. The Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival mission, along with the passion and creativity of Maria Irene Fornes and Murray Mednick, lives on through the efforts of these two remarkable women.

Birdie Come Home

written for SITE Specific 2007

by Ki Gottberg

(The audience is assembled in an art gallery, facing the street. A WANDERING WEIRDO walks by, looks in, doesn't see what he seeks, moves on. A VOICE emanates from the hallway)

VOICE

A pile! A heap! A masterpiece of mess! A Lumpen bumpin' thumpin' Shagamuffin! Slag Bag! Harridan Load! Mound o' Misery!

(A woman, NEST, enters the gallery. She is dressed in a disheveled yet considered manner, a kind of walking pile with a humped back. She moves with careful deliberation, and there is a distinguished cool gloom about her. She arrives before us)

NEST

Hello Friends. Hello. I am the Show. The Other Show. The show of, well, of human wreckage. I will be brief. My confession is an attempt to speak to what inhabits us all. Contradiction.
For example, as displayed (on the one hand) here in the illustrative effort towards splendor on these walls
(Indicates the walls)
and most certainly evinced in your presence here, your kind consideration of these words,
(She turns to the window)
while on the other hand, outside, another of our creations: the world. Our world. Continuing its mad spiral, down, down, an incessant chugging, sound, deeper, deeper. . .
(High voice)
above, my descant of doom. . .somewhere, located in that area I have just described between highest aspiration and barbaric greed is the loss of the happiest part of me.
(Now intimate, personal)
Oh Birdie. My Bird.

NEST (Cont'd)
Once upon a time

(Across the street BIRDIE appears, somewhat garish with feathers and a large ass. Her movement is coordinated with Nest's speech. She swans about)

NEST (Cont'd)
I was fresh. Free! Oh oh oh- Oyster world!

(They both dance in unison. While BIRDIE continues dancing and preening, NEST sits on the window ledge. BIRDIE swans to a perch and poses)

NEST (Cont'd)
(Remembers)
God, what a swan. The things I did, the chances I took. . . I was a glorious bird, flying free over an abundant landscape, landing and feasting where 'ere my heart desired. A world of "choice"! Such delight! Choose, choose! An ooze of "choose." And then the world chews me up.
(Calling out)
Bird! Oh, Birdie! Happiest heart of me!
My bird. . .flown.

(BIRDIE leaves her perch, gets across the street and moves towards the window. She dances along)

NEST (Cont'd)
Isn't she out there, somewhere, fluttering along just outside my self-made barricades? Is there no reassurance she still exists, the heart to which I harken in the darkening gloom?
And won't she ever come home?
Birdie!

(BIRDIE is now close, smashes her face against the glass, looking in at NEST)

NEST (Cont'd)
I'm sad. Very sad. I'm gonna sit here and get real grouchy. I'm gonna sit here and eat worms. I'm tired of living with a flat horizon, there's nothing that is balm to the wound, the gash at the center of living. . .

(BIRDIE appears. NEST has no idea this is her BIRDIE)

BIRDIE
Hello.

NEST
Cut the "O" and you named it.

BIRDIE
Oh.
(Thinking, realizes)
Oh.

NEST
(Looking her over)
Are you here to sell something? Mary Kaye? Sexual Health products?

BIRDIE
I am your bird.

NEST
You?
(Taken aback)
No.

BIRDIE
I am your Bird. You called. I came.

NEST
No. Not this. . .

BIRDIE
You think I wouldn't age? You think I'd stay young and frisky?

NEST
But your butt is so big. . .your feathers so garish. . .

BIRDIE
You thought I'd stay all bluebird cute? Your bird grew, just like you

NEST
In my fondest memory, I am--

BIRDIE
(Interrupts)
Oh, no! Fondest memory feed, such a romantic need. Tell me about the pain! Those are the memories that ring a deep bell, when you live to tell, bong bong!

NEST
You couldn't be my Bird.

BIRDIE
Why? My appetite too strange? I'm always hungry, and I'm sick quick of all the food. I pick. Picky picky pick. And I need special everything: vacations, sex, jewels, words. . .I'm very refined, and so terribly hungry! FEED ME!
(Squawk!)
I came to see the show!

NEST
What show? The show of refutation--
(Indicates the walls)
or the show of confession?
(Indicates herself)

BIRDIE
The show of unbearable delight, the one with the moment of total illumination, the show with the satisfying end.

NEST
You've come to a different place.

BIRDIE
I'll be the judge of that!

NEST
Well, get on with it then.

BIRDIE
Friendly!

(They face off, but BIRDIE moves on, observing the wall art and then the audience as if they are individual works of art. She contemplates several, settles on one. NEST watches BIRDIE intently, suspiciously)

BIRDIE
Interesting.

NEST
Oh come on.

BIRDIE
(Choosing one)
This one gives me a giddy feeling. Like I'm falling, falling down a dark well. Aaaah! I'm Alice, and you! You're the naughty bunny--one!

(BIRDIE flirts and is coy with her choice. BIRDIE chooses another)

BIRDIE
With this one I feel a kind of repressed sense of longing. . .a longing for more. . .more. . .what is it?
(Turns to NEST)
More of what?

NEST
How about "less." More of "less."

BIRDIE
Ouch! You're so grouch!

NEST
Less fat, less desire, less pain, suffering, loss. . .

BIRDIE
More fat. More fat, please.

NEST
It's bad for you.

BIRDIE
More rolls of flubber. More ooey-gooey. It a dry time, on the surface anyways. Everyone so cynical these days. Gimme some blub, sister. Hot tearful blubber.

NEST
You disgust me!

BIRDIE
You bore me!

NEST
This is what happens when your Birdie gets lost. . .

BIRDIE
And this is what happens when your Nest gets foul. . .

NEST
I'll make a new bird!

BIRDIE
You only get one!
(She squawks)
I'm always around, exactly like you made me!

NEST
I'll never be happy?

BIRDIE
Will you be? What do you do?

NEST
I work. Work! The whole of life divided into little cubicles of striving, ambition and ignorance. Yoga-ing away while the bombs fall! Desperately trying to keep up with the "facts"! I wake up, my head packed with the most mundane thoughts! "spray bleach on the gnats!" "where the hell is my cell phone!" "I've got to get some more sleep!" Attempting to create something worthwhile out of all of it! Something glorious even!!

BIRDIE
And here we are.

NEST
Yes.

BIRDIE
With them.
(Indicates the audience)

NEST
(Surveying, a little tentative)
Yes.

BIRDIE
And you were about to confess.

NEST
I can't now.

BIRDIE
(To audience)
I am her bird of happiness. Her "blue" bird of happiness. Gone wrong. I was conceived in childhood idle and imagination, mad romance, reckless loving, the glory of nature and a sense of immortality. I was lovely, fluffy and sung like a lark! I grew. Nurtured I was by all her "choices"; gluttony, avarice and jealousy ruled. A taste for power over men, children and animals informed myriad decisions. Vanity, always an avenue of selfish delight, was honored in the squandering of loads of money and futile attempts to stop time. Other "deadly sins" as well, employed in various contortions, created the bird you see before you now. I am what she made me. I am her Happiness. Squawk!

NEST
I'm gonna bust yer beak!

(NEST punches the squawking BIRDIE. Coconut clack sound. BIRDIE lies knocked out at NEST's feet. NEST looks at what she has done. Realizes)

NEST (Cont'd)
Bye Bye Birdie. My confession is an attempt to speak to what inhabits us all. . . Contradiction. I've killed my own bird of happiness! I was a hog.
(She kneels over her, fans her)

NEST (Cont'd)
Happiness. . .in a world so big and crazy, happiness, it's delicate breath so difficult to feel. I feel its breath now, a swelling here in my heart. Come on Birdie, come home!

(She breathes on BIRDIE)

Tiny. Framed in circumstances. Quiet even. Like. Like. Like. . .waiting all summer for peach season, finally taking that first bite of a warm one. . .

(Breath on BIRDIE)

Joy in spite of everything. . .ood mud-uddle

(Breathe on BIRDIE)

Doggie's wiggle-y dance at the door,

(Breath on BIRDIE, who is reviving, a sweet bird waking up)

or the peace in a kiss after a hard to-do. Or. Or.

BIRDIE

(To audience)

See what she does to animals?

(To NEST)

You were saying, about tiny happiness. . . Feed me. Feed me more.

NEST

Sly looks across a candle-lit bed.

BIRDIE

Hot Dogs with Kraut!

NEST

The Taj Mahal!

BIRDIE

That's big!

NEST

Dry Martinis! Doggie tricks!

BIRDIE

More! More!!

(The two of them dance off, BIRDIE snuggling into NEST, while NEST elaborates on more details of her true happiness)

-END-[401]

[401] Ki Gottberg, ***Birdie Come Home***, Unpublished, 2007.

Sanctuary

written for SITE Specific 2007

by Cheryl Slean

Cast of Characters

STEW: a young man wearing a Utilikilt and sandals

BURNS: a middle-aged male bounty hunter

MIKE: a female bounty hunter, younger than Burns

Time
A day or two after Tomorrow.

Place
An unmarked graveyard next to a chapel.

(STEW enters from behind the audience, humming softly to himself. The tune is the Marine Corps hymn, "From the Halls of Montezuma to the Shores of Tripoli." Every now and then some snippets of verse break through)

STEW
First to fight for right and freedom, and to keep our honor clean. . . In the snow of far off northern lands, and in sunny tropic scenes. . . If the Army and the Navy ever look on Heaven's scenes, they will find the streets are guarded by the United States Marines. . .

(When he gets to a particular part of the lawn he stops humming abruptly. He extends his hands and turns in a circle, as if feeling waves coming up from the ground)

STEW
Mmm. . . ohhh. . . this is. . . this has got to be. . .
(Shouting)
Grampa?!
(Immediately regretting his outburst)
Oh--
(Checking about for people)
Shh! Shh! Quiet.

(He creeps about, arms out, like a blind man looking for something)

STEW
(Loud whisper)
Grampa? Gramps? Is that you? Say again, say again?
(Pause, he has "lost the signal")
Oh, shoot. Oh, neat!

(He picks something out of the grass)

STEW
Dandelion. Good eatin'.

(He drops his arms, closes his eyes. For a moment it is quiet)

STEW
Wow, listen. Can you hear that? Life. . .

(MIKE and BURNS enter from a distance. They wear eclectic layers of clothing and futuristic/atomic-era goggles. Each has a black stick which he or she wields like a weapon. They appear to be on the lookout for something)

MIKE
This is it. The old chapel.

BURNS
I'm telling you it's shut. They sealed 'em all years ago. GOD IS DEAD and all that.

(As they approach, STEW ducks under a tree to hide)

MIKE
Think I’m stupid? Someone got in.

BURNS
So they said.

MIKE
What about that?

(She points to a light on the chapel)

BURNS
That could mean anything. They came, they plundered, they left.

MIKE
Police net said it’s a meeting. Rads and kooks--

BURNS
Theocritans.

MIKE
Some revo group. Worst name I ever heard.

BURNS
Just some kids on the lookout for god. In this godless age, can you blame ’em?

MIKE
All I know is we beat the cops to this we score big on the reward.

BURNS
It’s always the money with you.

MIKE
You got some other reason to be in this line of work?

BURNS
Well anyway, there’s no one here but the dead.

(BURNS gestures to the grassy area.
MIKE looks around)

MIKE
Kinda nice isn’t it? Pretty.

BURNS
Sure.

MIKE
One last pretty place.

BURNS
Not for long.

MIKE
Why can't you just appreciate something nice.

BURNS
Because I remember too much.

MIKE
Yeah, you should get that taken care of. Get a memory wipe or somethin'.

BURNS
Shht.

(BURNS has discovered STEW's hiding place and signals to MIKE, who immediately takes a position to prevent Stew's escape)

MIKE
You. In the bush. You can come out.

STEW
(Pause)
But I like it in here.

BURNS
Get out of there and stand up.

STEW
It smells like dirt and morning.

MIKE
Come on--!

(She bends down and hauls STEW up and out. STEW looks around)

STEW
Oh, it’s almost gone night.

BURNS
How long have you been down there?

STEW
I was looking for someone.

MIKE
For who?

STEW
I-- um.

BURNS
What’s your name?

STEW
Stew.

BURNS
Stew? Like what you eat?

STEW
(Pause)
My grandfather used to say that.

BURNS
Oh yeah?

STEW
It’s not funny when you say it.

MIKE
What, Burns not funny?

BURNS
I wasn’t trying to be funny.

MIKE
You sure? Cause I wouldn’t want to miss out on the big fat joke.

BURNS
Don’t worry Mike, you’re not missing a thing.

MIKE
Oh, ha ha, I get it.
(To STEW)
He’s referring to the cosmic joke.

STEW
What’s that?

MIKE
According to him, the fact of just being alive.
The guy is depressed.

BURNS
(Referring to STEW’s garment)
What is that, some kind of skirt?

STEW
It’s a kilt.

BURNS
A what?

STEW
Less binding than pants. And airy.

BURNS
Airy!

MIKE
It means he’s got nothing on under--

BURNS
--I know what it means!

STEW
Actually, a man of your girth might benefit from wearing a kilt.

MIKE
Ha! A man of your girth!

STEW
I mean, you know how pants tend to bind.

MIKE
(Laughing)
No more crammin' up in the rear, Burns! No more mashin' the ol' package.

BURNS
Would ya shut it?

STEW
Well anyway, it's an antique. They don't make 'em anymore.

MIKE
Too bad, Burns is dyin' to let 'em swing free.
(BURNS sighs deeply)

STEW
(To Mike)
It's not worth it to laugh at someone else's expense. That's like shooting an arrow backwards.

MIKE
(Suspicious)
What are you up to, Stew?

STEW
Not much. I eat raw food. I play the flute. I live in my car.

MIKE
What a surprise.

STEW
I've got it all set up, there's a bed and a campstove and a cooling system in the trunk--

BURNS
Sure, great-- what's your plan, Stew? You going over to the chapel?

STEW
(Pause)
Maybe.

BURNS
What for.

STEW
I don’t know. Is it quiet?

BURNS
Why, gonna say a few prayers? Gonna ask for forgiveness or somethin’? Lotta good that’ll do you my friend. Go ahead, make a plea to your old god, listen to the deafening quiet.

STEW
(Looking from one to the other)
What are you, cops or something?

MIKE
Cops, no.

BURNS
No, we’re not cops. I’m Burns and this is Mike.

STEW
Hi.

BURNS
So you said you were looking for someone? Here to meet someone are you?

STEW
I. . . guess you could call it--

MIKE
A meeting?

BURNS
A meeting? With whom?

STEW
I don’t know, would you call it a meeting if you’re not expected?

MIKE
Who are you meeting with, Stew?

STEW
I don’t even know if I can find him.

MIKE
Who?

STEW
My, uh, granddad. I know it sounds ridiculous. . .

MIKE
Not at all. . .

(She puts on her goggles and scans through data that appears to be displayed in the air before her)

MIKE
Grandfather? On the mother or father's side?

STEW
Father's.

MIKE
Father, Mitchell. Grandfather, Morris, deceased--deceased!

STEW
He was a Marine. Died in Iraq.

BURNS
Which war?

STEW
The long one.

BURNS
(Nodding sympathetically)
Mm.

STEW
My father was one too. It's in the blood I guess.

BURNS
Until you.

STEW
Actually, I'm thinking of joining up.

MIKE
Why? It's a death sentence.

STEW
(Shrugging)
In the blood.

BURNS
Correct me if I'm wrong, but you came here to meet your grandfather--

STEW
Well--

BURNS
Who is dead.

MIKE
Sounds fishy to me.

STEW
I told you, meet is not the right word--

BURNS
Words may or may not be able to get you out of this, sonny.

STEW
What am I in, exactly?

BURNS
Why don't you tell me.

STEW
The. . . cemetery next to the chapel?

(BURNS squints at him for a moment, then gestures to MIKE. They walk off a little distance and confab intensely.

STEW's attention is drawn to something in the audience. He goes there, gets down on his knees, searches the ground between the feet of audience members, muttering to himself.)

MIKE and BURNS come back)

MIKE
What are you doing?

(STEW pops up in the middle of the audience)

STEW
Nothing!

BURNS
Who were you talking to, Stew.

(MIKE goes en guard, putting on her goggles and searching the area)

STEW
I don’t. . . really know.

MIKE
Other people? A meeting?

BURNS
A meeting?

STEW
Not people exactly. . . Ex-people.

MIKE
What’s that, some new gang? Band-of-X spinoff?

STEW
New?, No-- old. Very old. Dead actually.

MIKE
Dead, or undead?

BURNS
(Doubletake on MIKE)
--What?

STEW
There seem to be a lot over there.

(STEW gestures vaguely to the audience. MIKE turns and examines the area through her goggles)

MIKE
I see nothing.

STEW
Not quite. . . nothing.

MIKE
Excuse me--
(Pointing to the goggles)
Multi-spectral scanner, motion detector, explosives detector, laser sat-link, onboard database, hunter-tracker-tracer, triple-A night-gogs-- I'm telling you man, you can't see it in these babies, it ain't there.

STEW
I didn't say I could see them.

BURNS
The kid's giving us gas.

STEW
I can feel them out there. Sort of-- watching.

MIKE
You giving us gas, Stew?

STEW
It's like smell, you know when you smell something that sends you back to the past? It's like that, a kind of-- connection.

MIKE
(To BURNS)
You smell anything?

BURNS
The usual. Smoke. Burning oil.

MIKE
Stew here smells dead bodies.

STEW
That’s not what I--

MIKE
Stew here can locate ancient burial grounds with his nose.

BURNS
All right.

MIKE
Stew here--

BURNS
--all right, that’s enough.

MIKE
I’m calling it in.

BURNS
What?

MIKE
The guy is a nutcase!

BURNS
So what?

MIKE
Matches the profile.
(Off BURNS’ reaction)
Is there a problem?

(BURNS’ noncommittal response gives MIKE pause, but eventually she moves off and makes a call into her watch. STEW peers into the audience. BURNS watches him curiously)

BURNS
See your grandpa?

STEW
No.

BURNS
Sure he’s buried here?

STEW

(Pause)

No.

BURNS

Well how could you be, there's no markers.

(Pause)

They say it's no good to remember. Don't listen to 'em sonny. Memories. . . can sometimes be a comfort.

STEW

Or not.

BURNS

Yeah. Done and over, right? Can't change it ***now***. Can't do anything about it ***now***.

(Pause)

They named all the test shots, you know. There were thousands, over the years. The boys had to get creative.

(MIKE re-joins them)

BURNS

Like writers they were, new parents, what shall we name this 50 kiloton kid? What name befits the squat metallic babyface of evil?

(Pause)

There was one named Mike.

MIKE

Oh yeah? What about Stew?

BURNS

No Stew. There was a Starfish.

(Pause)

Able, Baker, Charlie, of course. Diablo, Dog--

MIKE

Dog?

BURNS

--George, Grable, Harlan, Harry, Hornet, How, Item, Moth, Prime, Priscilla, Wahoo, Little Feller--

MIKE
Jesus--

BURNS
To name a few.

MIKE
There was a bomb named How?

BURNS
Just another character in the Big Show, the prank, the vaudeville of devils. And now, ladies and gentlemen. . .

(BURNS wanders away, deflated)

MIKE
(By way of explanation)
He always says that when he goes off to pee. And now, ladies and gentlemen. . .

STEW
My Mom's name is Priscilla. She went gay after Dad left. After that I hardly saw him. I was raised by a lot of women which might explain my occasional sexual confusion.

MIKE
Too much information, Stew.

STEW
For example, a normal man would probably find you unattractive in all that tactical gear.

(MIKE takes a moment to parse this)

MIKE
Should I punch you for that? I should punch you.

STEW
I'm sorry, but that's why I came here! I have my father's voice in my head, telling me how to be a man. Join the Marines he says. Give your life for your country. That's what men do in our family. Are you a man or not?
(Pause)
I just wanted to talk to granddad first to see if he corroborates.

MIKE
Shit, you want advice from the dead? Ask all the kids who've died in the Thirty Wars. Half my friends are dead! My brother, my--. Did they know what they were fighting for? Do you?

STEW
I guess I'm feeling confused. I need to stop talking or something.

(MIKE sees something from the corner of her eye)

MIKE
What was that?

(She puts on her goggles and steps away for a better look)

STEW
When I'm quiet I can feel textures. I can feel the moment unfold. There are whole new worlds in that moment. Whole new worlds.

(MIKE returns)

MIKE
I think your clan has arrived.

STEW
If you just stop talking a minute, you'd see.

MIKE
See what? Your meeting? Your plan?

STEW
Shh! Listen.
(Pause)
There is life in the quiet.

MIKE
What quiet, it's nothing but noise.

STEW
Not that there isn't sound, but there's a quiet within the sound. It's up here.
(Touching his head)
It's in here.
(Touching his heart)
I can't explain it, but it's alive-- it's life. You have to believe me.

MIKE
Kid, what I hear, what I see, what I *smell* is a burning city. The smoke of blasted refineries and the chemical stink of explosions. Incineration, black ashes and fallout.

STEW
Smell this.

(He holds out the clump of weeds he gathered earlier)

MIKE
What is it?

STEW
Dandelion. Good eatin'.

MIKE
Seriously?

(MIKE tries a bit, chews it and spits it out)

MIKE
That's disgusting.

STEW
Just a little bitter. You've been spoiled by too many sweets.

MIKE
(Lying)
I don't have a problem with sweets.

STEW
I'm just saying. What came before the city burning?

MIKE
Bombs.

STEW
What came before bombs?

MIKE
Riots.

STEW
And before that?

MIKE
Uh. . .

STEW
Addiction.

MIKE
What?

STEW
To comfort, at any cost. Your fridge stocked with meat and your car full of gas and your kids entertained and each moment of every day shaped and planned for your pleasure and comfort.

MIKE
What's wrong with that?

STEW
It's greedy. You wanna let greed run your life?

(BURNS returns)

BURNS
Yeah, Mike. What kind of a man are you that you can't withstand the vicissitudes of pleasure and pain?

STEW
Wow, you talk just like the Dad in my head.

MIKE
Did you call me a man?

BURNS
Greed is like stopping time. It's like thinking that what you do today has no impact upon tomorrow. But time--

MIKE
Can we drop it?

BURNS
--Time passes. And if time has to pass, young Mike here would say, then let it pass with some meaning! Let me have direction, reward!

STEW
You really sound like my father.

MIKE
He talks like that all the time. One of these days, it's gonna be him they're looking to wipe.

(BURNS dismisses the threat with a wave)

BURNS
You people are much too young--

MIKE
(Seeing something)
--What was that?

(MIKE goes to investigate)

BURNS
--Wait'll you get to be my age. All your crude perceptions of immortality will pop like a bad firework.

MIKE
Shadows by the chapel. Four, maybe ten.

BURNS
(To Stew)
Those your buddies, Stew?

STEW
Who?

BURNS
What is it you're looking for anyway, peace? Some kind of sanctuary? Well eventually you'll have to come out my friend, out from the shade of your hopeful god, and deal with life as a mortal. What happens when the past is the past and the future is nothing but this? The slow decay of your body. Your rank and certain demise.

STEW
It's no wonder you're depressed with ideas like that.

MIKE
Where is the friggin' pickup? Burns, we should grab him and get out of here.

BURNS
I'm just telling the truth.

STEW
Not the whole truth.

BURNS
No?
(Pause)
You think I might be missing something.

STEW
Yeah.

BURNS
That's right in front of my face.

STEW
All around.

BURNS
All around.

(A beat while BURNS considers this)

MIKE
That's it-- we're outta here, now!

(She grabs STEW and moves to take off. BURNS stops her)

BURNS
No.

MIKE
What?

BURNS
Not him.

MIKE
Burns, that's a lot of money.

BURNS
Always the money. Does he look like a terrorist to you?

MIKE
He fits the profile.

BURNS
Which part, the skirt part? Or the talking to the dead?

(MIKE points her deathstick at BURNS)

MIKE
Get out of my way.

BURNS
Aw, Mike. Why d'you want to do that?

STEW
Hey, listen, I'll go if she--

BURNS
--No. You belong here.

MIKE
(To Burns)
You've changed. Something's happened to you.

BURNS
(Pause)
Yeah. Guess you're right.

(BURNS suddenly turns to the chapel and flings his arms up)

BURNS
Open the doors, then! Open the doors and let the light in!

MIKE
Shut up! What are you doing?

(A man in the distance hears the commotion and approaches)

BURNS
Stew here’s gonna save us.

MIKE
Oh no, is that a cop?

BURNS
Whoever he is, he’s coming.

MIKE
This is the end of it Burns. Do you hear me!

(MIKE glares at him, gets no response, and runs off in frustration)

BURNS
(Watching MIKE go)
You gonna save us, Stew? From burning ourselves up?

STEW
I could do my part. Join up.

BURNS
To be honest, you don’t seem cut out for the military life.

(BURNS checks over his shoulder, but the “cop” is walking away and the coast is clear)

STEW
That’s what my mother said.

BURNS
You should listen to your mother.

STEW
She said I should listen to myself.

BURNS
Well, that's a trick.

STEW
Oh no, it's easy. All you have to do is be quiet.

BURNS
Quiet, huh? I think I could do that.

(BURNS turns and walks away, toward the chapel. STEW lifts his hand in farewell. He drops it and is quiet for a moment, eyes closed, smiling, in the presence of life)

-END-[402]

[402] Cheryl Slean, ***Sanctuary***, Unpublished, 2007.

CHAPTER EIGHT:
CONCLUSION

> The marvelous in man is his creativity.
>
> — Sam Smiley, ***Playwriting: The Structure of Action***[403]

Almost thirty years ago, Maria Irene Fornes noted there were no Latina/o dramatic writers. She deliberately set out to create a generation of such playwrights by honing her own pedagogical abilities on select students at INTAR. Now, thirty years hence, a body of highly acclaimed, original, Latina/o work exists to which the entire world refers. Fornes single-handedly created a dramatic model which now, with Nilo Cruz having won the Pulitzer in 2003, will be deemed classic. It was critically important to her, however, that the young Latina/o Americans she worked with created their own aesthetic that arose truthfully from their particular and unique experience in the American culture. She stated in a 1988 interview for ***Contemporary Authors***:

> . . . it's very important that a playwright not be rushed into writing a play that would be acceptable as a play by commercial standards. I think that applies to any writer, any creative

[403] Smiley, 19.

> person, anyway; but it applies more to people who don't have a world of creativity which corresponds to their own sensibility.[404]

Fornes applied this same principle in the classes she taught at the Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival.

As well, many significant names in the world of theatre emerged from Padua including two-time Pulitzer Prize finalist David Henry Hwang and Pulitzer Prize finalist Jon Robin Baitz who laud the training they received there. Though it would be antithetical to this dissertation to rate success in terms of Pulitzer Prize nominations and winnings, it is likely without the determined and selfless efforts of the entities' primary teachers, Maria Irene Fornes and Murray Mednick, these playwrights would not have emerged as significant voices in American theatre.

The Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival was unique in its approach to theatre and playwriting in that it considered the pedagogy of playwriting an art in and of itself and used the workshop aspect to "examine the creative processes of playwriting and playmaking . . . and

[404] May and Lesniak, ***Contemporary Authors,*** 180.

continue to evolve new ways of teaching the art."[405] As a movement, its roots can easily be traced directly to Off Off Broadway where both Mednick and Fornes began their theatre careers as well as to the Provincetown Players who helped spawn the experimental artist enclave in Greenwich Village. The difference with Padua lies in its pedagogical focus and its location--the West--long ignored as an area capable of producing legitimate theatre of influence.

This pedagogy included the unfailing belief in the playwright as creative thinker and artist heralded by Eric Bentley almost 40 years prior[406] and focused on the playwright's development as artist rather than the play as commodity--an important distinction in this era of ***play*** rather than ***playwright*** development The exercises developed by Fornes and Mednick were designed to take the writer to "the place where creativity is."[407] They did this by accessing the subconscious through the senses--Mednick primarily through listening to the body and Fornes primarily through seeing imaginatively--and by ruthlessly

[405] Mednick, "Statement of Purpose: The Padua Hills Playwrights' Workshop," 165.

[406] Bentley, ***The Playwright As Thinker***.

[407] Savran, 58.

demanding utter submission. The result was development of what Gottberg termed "authentic voice."[408]

The development of "authentic voice"[409] embodies Fornes's belief in the imagination and Mednick's belief that, much like sculpture or any piece of art, every play is unique, with its own structure, just as is each playwright and thus each playwright's vision. This pedagogy was also a way of life.

It has been said that for Fornes, life and art were one and the same.[410] More than an observer, she seems to have truly understood life and was able to impart that knowledge to others as evidenced in her "Learning How To Create Life" classes. Mednick, too, had his students ponder the large questions: What is life? What is man? as the basis for their work. This way of art as life and life as art manifested in the communal aspect of Padua and likely made the greatest lifelong impression on its students, ensuring deep and permanent connectedness to their work.

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[408] Gottberg and Slean Interview, 22 September 2007.

[409] Ibid.

[410] Svich, "Conducting a Life: A Tribute to Maria Irene Fornes," in *Conducting a Life: Reflections on the Theatre of Maria Irene Fornes*, xv.

Though there does not yet seem to be a true offshoot of the pedagogical and communal aspects that so characterized Padua, SITE Specific furthered its mentors' producing model to the outside performance arena and has plans to include pedagogy in future festivals. However, Gottberg, Slean, and I pass on the legacy of our mentors in the classes we individually teach.

"Authentic voice"[411] as taught by these authentic teachers--for that is what Fornes and Mednick were--was a magical experience, the teachers charismatic. They proved that the teacher ***is*** the teaching, imparting embodied, long accrued knowledge. Considering what little is left of Aristotle's writings, words that seem at first flat on the page, one can surmise it must have been his charisma that caused these words to become so holy. As with Aristotle, Mednick and Fornes, revisionist Aristotles in their own right, begot disciples who are begetting converts who will beget others, and so on, exponentially, ensuring the endurance of this unique approach to playwriting and in the process continuing to "evolve new ways of teaching the

[411] Gottberg and Slean Interview, 22 September 2007.

art”[412] thus honoring what is “marvelous in man--his creativity.”[413]

[412] Mednick, “Statement of Purpose: The Padua Hills Playwrights” Workshop,” 165.

[413] Smiley, 19.

APPENDIX A: IRB PRELIMINARY E-MAIL TO PARTICIPANTS

Email Subject Line: Consent Agreement for Interview Data for Padua/Fornes Project

I would like to interview you for my dissertation project, ***Conducting a Pedagogy: The Influence of Maria Irene Fornes on Three Contemporary Women Playwrights.***[414] If you are interested and willing to take part in this project, please read the attached Consent Agreement for Interview Data and, if it meets with your approval, sign and return to me. See the Agreement for further information and instructions. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask.

Thank you.

Andrea Onstad

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[414] The dissertation title was revised after research concluded. The new title, "Conducting a Pedagogy: The Influence of Maria Irene Fornes's Teaching and The Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival on Three Contemporary Women Playwrights," was approved by the Campus Institutional Review Board in an E-mail dated 7 July 2009 which stated:

> Hello,
>
> We have received the changes for the project entitled "Conducting a Pedagogy: The Influence of Maria Irene Fornes's Teaching and The Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival on Three Contemporary Women Playwrights." It has been determined that these changes do not increase the risk to participants. The project continues to meet the criteria for Exempt Level Review.
>
> Thank you,
> The Campus Institutional Review Board.

Erin Lea Bryant, E-Mail to Andréa J. Onstad, Subject: ***Campus IRB: Project #1093657***, 7 July 2009.

APPENDIX B: IRB CONSENT AGREEMENT

CONSENT AGREEMENT FOR INTERVIEW DATA

Title of Project: ***Conducting a Pedagogy: The Influence of Maria Irene Fornes on Three Contemporary Women Playwrights.***[415]

Description of Project: In this project, I am using the tools of ethnographic and autoethnographic data collection as described by Carolyn Ellis in ***The Ethnographic Eye*** to explore the playwriting teaching strategies of Maria Irene Fornes specifically as they apply to three women playwrights who attended the Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival. I am also conducting research on the Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival in the form of interviews of its principle founder(s). The purpose of this project is to expose West Coast women playwrights' work to the academic community; to expose the value of the Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival to the academic community; and to ensure Fornes's playwriting teaching legacy.

Your Role: Interviews are required for this project. Your role is to be an interviewee. I will be asking you a number of questions concerning your involvement with the Padua Hills Workshop and Festival and your experiences as a playwright in those classes, in particular, those taught by Maria Irene Fornes. I will be asking for samples of your work that were created in and as a result of those classes. The interviews will take place over email and telephone and should take no more than two hours of your time overall.

Benefits: There are several benefits to this project: (1) to advance scholarly work on the teaching of playwriting; (2) to advance scholarly work on West Coast women playwrights; (3) to advance scholarly work on Maria Irene Fornes's approach to teaching playwriting; and (4) to advance scholarly work on the Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival.

[415] See footnote 412, p. 352.

Possible Risks: I do not foresee any risks or discomfort for the participants of this project. However, if at any time a participant wishes to no longer participate or prefers information stated not be used or to be used anonymously, these desires will be honored. Participation is voluntary.

Participant Consent: If you agree to take part in this project, please read the statement below, sign, and return this agreement to me at: Andréa J. Onstad, 900 Woodrow Street, Columbia, MO 65201; telephone: (573) 874-1323; facsimile: same; email: onstad@juno.com.

Agreement: I, the participant, am aware that the researcher, Andréa J. Onstad, is recording the answers to interview questions concerning this project and my words may be used in the final version of this project. In addition, I am aware that any plays I give to Andréa J. Onstad may be used in the final version of this project.

_____ _____

Signature Date

_____

Print Name

Contact Information: If you have any questions regarding this research or your participation, or if you need further information, please contact me:

Andréa J. Onstad
900 Woodrow Street
Columbia, MO 65201
Telephone: (573) 874-1323
Facsimile: same (call to set up)
onstad@juno.com

or the University of Missouri-Columbia Campus Institutional Review Board:

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University of Missouri-Columbia
483 McReynolds
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Telephone: (573) 882-9585
Facsimile: (573) 884-0663
umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu

This project is conducted under the guidelines of the University of Missouri-Columbia's Campus Institutional Review Board and has been approved by them.

Thank you for your time and participation.

APPENDIX C: IRB SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PADUA HILLS PLAYWRIGHTS WORKSHOP AND FESTIVAL FOUNDER(S):

How did Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival begin?

What was the impetus behind forming such a project?

What is the history of the workshop from its beginnings to today?

How did you choose the initial artists to work with?

How did you know Maria Irene Fornes?

What was Padua's mission?

How was that mission determined? Did that mission change over time?

What was Padua's vision of playwriting pedagogy?

How was that vision determined? Did that vision change over time?

How did the artists who taught at Padua manifest that vision?

Did the artists learn from each other?

What strategies, if any, did you learn from Fornes in particular?

Did you ever attend any of her classes, either as an observer or as a student?

Were any of your plays influenced by her exercises? If so, which ones, and which exercises? Describe.

What is the difference between playwriting taught in academia today (if you know) and playwriting as it was taught at Padua?

What is the role of Aristotle in Padua playwriting pedagogy and in your own playwriting pedagogy?

How do you see Padua influencing future generations of theatre writers?

Is there a plan for Padua pedagogy to continue and if so, how?

Cheryl Slean and Ki Gottberg are attempting to create a version of Padua in Seattle. Are you aware of this or of any other attempts to recreate that experience? Explain.

Did Padua achieve its objective(s)? How? Or if not, why not?

Why was Padua not better recognized and acknowledged in academia and in the theatre culture as a whole?

Astonishingly, archival research reveals only one serious academic published article on Padua. In your opinion, why was Padua ignored by academia? David Copelin, a PhD in theatre, was on staff at the first Padua Workshop. Did his decision not to pursue a career in academia have an effect on the lack of scholarly investigation into Padua? Why or why not?

What was the role of Padua in the general scheme of playwriting, Fornes's INTAR group, future playwrights, and effect on theatre in the United States (and the world) in general?

How much influence did Richard Schechner's environmental theatre have on your work and the founding of Padua? What came first, Schechner or Padua?

Why did you choose to work in California rather than New York (as it seems any theatre west of the Mississippi goes unrecognized)?

What is your role as a playwriting teacher? Do you see yourself as both teacher and writer or primarily writer?

How did Padua change you as an artist? As a teacher of playwriting?

How did knowing and working with Maria Irene Fornes change you as an artist? As a teacher of playwriting?

Thank you.

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PADUA HILLS PLAYWRIGHTS WORKSHOP AND FESTIVAL WOMEN WRITERS WHO WORKED WITH MARIA IRENE FORNES:

I have previously asked versions of these questions for a paper I wrote for a class. Please bear with me as I ask them in hopefully another way, once again. This time I am looking for extended answers.

When did you first encounter Maria Irene Fornes and what was that impression?

How did you happen to study writing at Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop and Festival?

Was the fact that Fornes was teaching an influence on your decision to study at Padua?

What about Padua has most influenced your writing?

How were Fornes's playwriting exercises different from the other Padua playwriting exercises, if they were?

Of all the plays you have written, how many do you think were written as a direct result of utilizing Fornes's techniques?

Besides the short plays that you have already shared with me, what longer plays have you written that you can point to sections that either were directly written in a Fornes class inspired by a certain exercise or written as a result of taking a class?

Please share these sections and describe the exercise and the effect it had on the writing of the section.

How does Fornes's approach to playwriting pedagogy differ from other playwriting teachers you have studied with?

What has been the overall effect of her approach to your writing--in all genres?

How do you think Fornes's approach to teaching writing changed over the years that you knew her and studied with her?

Did you ever visit her at INTAR? What did you think about the INTAR project?

If you are a teacher of writing--any genre--how have Padua exercises and Fornes's in particular, informed your pedagogy?

Comparing the traditional Aristotelian approach to an academic class in beginning playwriting to the Fornes approach, how would you say they differ? Pros and cons for both.

Fornes studied painting and was a visual artist before she became a playwright. How has that informed her pedagogy and thus how has it formed yours? Is it necessary to be a visual person to study with Fornes? Explain.

Fornes also observed Method actors workshops as a part of her apprenticeship to playwriting and some say her approach to writing plays is simply a Method approach. Do you think this is true? Why or why not.

It is theatre lore that the only play Fornes had read before she began writing plays was Ibsen's ***Hedda Gabbler***. Do you think it is necessary for beginning playwrights today to have a solid foundation in theatre before they begin to write plays? Why or why not? In what ways can knowing too much about playwriting hinder a newly developing creative mind? In what ways can it help?

It is also theatre lore that Fornes was essentially self-educated. In what ways, do you think, that helped her create her own vision and style, or if it hindered, how did it hinder?

As a playwriting teacher, how much influence do you think Fornes had on the current generation of playwrights? How much do you think she will continue to have?

Due to the current climate of ownership of her exercises, what is the danger, do you think, that her legacy will be

erased and buried as has happened to so many other women theatre artists? Explain.

I am most interested in describing Fornes's exercises and linking them to "finished" plays of her students and describing those moments of connection ethnographically--that is, I am interested in pinpointing that spark of creation, requiring a condition of self-awareness much like that of actors in the moment of re/creation on stage--in order to describe these moments. Anything you can recall and are willing to share about the process of utilizing Fornes's exercises while experiencing them and the connection or "spark of creativity" they provided would be much appreciated.

I would like to read as much of your writing as you are willing to share, particularly plays that were written either at Padua or as a result of attending Padua and would like to ask you to identify those works that were written directly as a result of specific exercises executed by Fornes. Some of these excerpts and possibly a full length play could be published in my dissertation along with your comments and discussion of the influence of these exercises. I am particularly looking for long one-acts or full-lengths that were composed entirely from exercises.

Thank you.

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