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FROM THE EDITOR

Reimagining, Reclaiming, and Retelling

This issue groups together authors who reconfigure space, time, memory, history, and nationality. These authors call for healing on many levels, as well as new ways to remember the past. Each of them enacts a reclamation of narrative, of discourse, and of perspective.

Andreea Chiriță's "Memories of Wars and Revolutions in Wang Chong's Theatre" will pull you back in time to deconstructed memory in relation to China's youth nationalism in the works of Wang Chong. Looking to an aesthetic of violence, Chiriță calls on Michael Rothberg's concept of "'multidirectional memory,'" which holds both past and present in simultaneity, to create "new meanings of past experiences in the present world," allowing repressed memories of Chinese wars to resurface from what Chong calls "historical amnesia." Chiriță recognizes this process as Chong's "double-edged theatrical discourse" that forces Chinese youth to "question the way that China officially commemorates its past and processes its present." In a "'theatre of im*media*cy'" whose ghosts still haunt historical visibility, this sort of "multi-dimensional memory can lead audiences to uncover unknown aspects of their own past" and "examine critically historical revelations deliberately concealed by official narratives." In a complicated section entitled "War Rape as a Metaphor of Patriarchal Nationalism," Chiriță draws on Lydia Liu's claim that "'the female body is ultimately displaced by nationalism.'" In Wang Chong's *The Warfare of Landmine 2.0*, Chiriță describes a rape scene as it is enacted by three men who sequentially rape one woman. This scene symbolizes the brutality of Japanese soldiers who used Chinese war victims as sex slaves. Chiriță tells us that the performance of the rape is obvious, but only in a "veiled and coded manner." She argues that this act is veiled for two reasons: the social stigma placed on these "'comfort women' across Asia–Pacific"; and the ghosted victims of war crimes. She says, "Viewed through the lens of multi-directional memory, this scene reveals how Chong juxtaposes the obscurity of this episode within Japan's war remembrance practices with the tragic obscurity of the victims within their own national history." The whole point of using multidirectional memory here is to allow memories of the past to resurface in a present that must reconcile what has been consciously swept under the rug of history. Chiriță sees Chong's production choices in this regard as "attempts to construct a healing dialogue" between a veiled past and a more responsible present.

Valleri Robinson's "Staging Stalingrad: Building a Wartime Alliance, Pro-Soviet Propaganda, and the Trope of the Two Americas, 1942–1947" paints a picture of these brief years after World War II as a time of attempted peace between the United States and the USSR. She points to staged performances of the National Council of American–Soviet Friendship (NCASF) toward this end, in defense against the concept of "two Americas": one admired for industry and the other "ridiculed for its socioeconomic and racial conditions." In the first of these, "progressive ideals and

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freedoms were fused with a pro-Soviet, antiwar stance, and in the other America fascism, racism, imperialism, and capitalism prevailed." The precursor to this group, the Friends of Soviet Russia (FSR), worked with the Theatre Wing, an American group established by Actors' Equity, to stage Sandra Michael's skit "My Brother Lives in Stalingrad" in an event that featured Orson Welles and Charlie Chaplin among others. Productions such as these also appeared on radio programs, as did scenes from the Theatre Guild's *The Russian People*, written by Konstantin Simonov and adapted by Clifford Odets, where "the NCASF used live theatrical performance as a means of building empathy and understanding of the Soviets while also celebrating wartime alliance." The play was staged in Washington, DC, during the Battle of Stalingrad. Other actors and directors who participated in these sorts of events included Paul Mann, Margaret Webster, and Harold Clurman. Another play by Simonov, staged by Clurman at the Biltmore in 1947, was *And So It Will Be* (adapted by Thelma Schnee as *The Whole World Over*), featuring Uta Hagen and Sanford Meisner. After his return to Russia, Robinson notes that Simonov himself depicted a "split America" and wrote *The Russian Question* as a play that popularized this image, which then became "the central metaphor of America used in Cold War Soviet propaganda." The play was revered in the Soviet Union, and the film version received the 1948 Stalin Prize, while in the United States the NCASF interpreted Simonov's efforts as a faithful representation of their own work for peace. The chairman and executive director of the NCASF, Corliss Lamont and Richard Morford, were called upon by the House Un-American Activities Committee to provide records of the Council's work. As Robinson attests, this led to a decades-long court battle "against government overreach, unconstitutional actions, and an infringement on American civil liberties." But during 1942–7, the NCASF used multiple public stage appearances to build American–Soviet empathy, relying on activist performance to influence public opinion.

In Guanda Wu's "'Artistic' Femininity: Republican *Nandan* and the Discourse of *Xiqu* 'Aestheticism,'" this scholar takes on Peggy Phelan's arguments about gender performance and illustrates why these might not apply to early female impersonation by Chinese *xiqu* male performers. Wu argues that "Although the divide between the two forms of femininity authorizes Phelan's critique of classical Asian performances, such an understanding is a product of modernity and cannot cogently explicate the gender performances of female-role players in various Asian theatres in premodern times." Whereas Phelan's argument holds an epistemological division between the absence of actual women in these roles and the surface femininity for which their performances are best known, for Japan's Edo *onnagata* this performance was meant to be understood as the "'imitating imitated.'" As Wu suggests, "if gender is what appears on the surface, isn't it unfair to refute something already on the surface for lacking depth?" Wu finds that an exploration of the historicity of this "artistic" femininity in premodern cross-gender performance is long overdue. The "mimetic gap" between performer and performed is one that *nandan* aficionados appreciated as "a merit of the dramaturgy." In fact, he contends that embracing such an idea "as a priori has not only restricted the fluidity in interpreting *nandan*'s stagecraft and their gendered personae but also compromised *nandan* players' own agency of positioning themselves on the gender spectrum." This was particularly true for *siyu* performers in the late Qing dynasty, whose "private residence" performance sites were semipublic events whose homoeroticism led the Republic of China to shut them down as "illicit." Performers after this 1912 declaration "had to mark the stage as the only space in

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which such theatricality was legitimate." Famous female impersonator Mei Lanfang was one of these performers who began as a *siyu* player and became "the *nandan* par excellence" of the twentieth century. Under this new regime, "The split between 'artistic' femininity onstage and 'natural' masculinity offstage became increasingly essential to the identity of what [Wu terms] 'modern *nandan*,' a new generation of cross-dressed males in *xiqu*, whose *offstage* masculinity (and heterosexuality) needed to be compellingly performed so as to make their *stage* portrayals of female roles socially acceptable and aesthetically explicable." Artifice meant everything.

Carmen Gitre's "Claiming Ancient Egypt: Operetta *'Aida* and the Making of Modern Egyptians" tackles a similar topic in relation to the performative ways in which Syrian writer Selim al-Naqqash translated and adapted Giuseppe Verdi's opera *Aida*, which "relayed that Egyptians were worthy protagonists not just on the dramatic but also on the global stage," into an operetta performed in modern Arabic. Gitre argues that "Egyptianizing *Aida* meant seizing control of a narrative of Egyptian history, complicating European claims to be inheritors and caretakers of the ancient Egyptian past, and demonstrating how that past might be reclaimed, retold, and reinterpreted to build a shared community." Creating the Egyptian *'Aida* meant to Naqqash that "theatre was vital to the creation of . . . a 'social body' (*al-hay'a al-ijtimā 'iyya*) which was, in turn, essential to progress." Operetta was a popular form of musical theatre in Egypt, and when Naqqash Egyptianized Verdi's opera, it was the obvious mode to use. In this way, "theatre practitioners were planting the seeds for a new conception of Egyptian identity by elevating the Arabic language, associating with Western culture in local idioms, and representing the greatness of ancient Egypt before elite audiences." This Arabic version was quite popular, even in unexpected contexts. Gitre claims, "In delivering a message that modern Egyptians were bound together as inheritors of a common past, entertainments such as *'Aida* helped lay the groundwork for what would become a leading contender for creating a shared national identity." Verdi's opera, commissioned by the Khedive of Egypt, Ismail, premiered in Cairo's Khedivial Opera House in 1871 as part of an urban renewal project. A few years later Naqqash gave it back to the Egyptian populace in a form that allowed an Arabic reclamation of this ancient history.

Birgitta Lindh Estelle examines the reception of Anne Charlotte Leffler's *True Women* as successful Scandinavian theatre that gender inequality kept from British production when Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg came to prominence. Her article, "Gender and Nation as Symbolic Challenge: The British Reception of Swedish Playwright Anne Charlotte Leffler's *True Women*," pulls this unacknowledged female playwright into a spotlight beside these two famous male writers. In Britain, Leffler was hailed as the New Woman, an avant-garde playwright, and a social movement intellectual. Apparently, "The socialist and suffrage movement circles and their connection to the Independent Theatre Society" were what boosted Leffler's visibility. In fact, Leffler actively aligned herself with the New Woman movement and London socialists. Her works offered what many tried to paint Ibsen's work as being: feminist. Yet Ibsen himself never sought to be a voice for disempowered women, whereas Leffler did. The suffrage movement of the 1880s was Leffler's background context for her work. Ibsen's Scandinavian gender-critical dramas were headliners of the late nineteenth century. This male playwright opened British doors in the 1890s, although Leffler's *True Women* was part of British discussions as early as 1885, offering "new interpretive frameworks for British playwriting and theatre." As Lindh Estelle argues, artistic and social change are intertwined. Leffler's advocates named her "'the George

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Eliot of Scandinavia,'" and the press considered her second only to Ibsen, but her play was rarely produced in Europe at the time despite this fanfare. She is one of many female theatre artists whose stories need to be told.

I am reminded of the many pockets found in historical research. These spaces have been stitched, unstitched, and restitched using multicultural threads that teach us to see and resee what has been trapped inside of previous narratives. In essence, the way we tell a story determines what the story is and who hears it. These are new voices retelling old tales from fresh perspectives. This is a way to retell theatre history so that its memory is multidirectional.

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