Passion for the Antarctic: a short play

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ABSTRACT. *Passion for the Antarctic* is the third scene of *Tangled destinies*, a play written by Jason Kendall Moore, directed by María Angelica Luzzi, and performed by Daniela Meneses and the author. It opened on 17 July 2010, in Valparaíso, Chile, where it will run through the first week of September. The Center for Hemispheric and Polar Studies has funded its production to generate interest in U.S.–Chilean relations in the Antarctic and elsewhere.

Preface

The Center for Hemispheric and Polar Studies in Chile has funded the production of *Tangled destinies*, a play written by Jason Kendall Moore, directed by María Angélica Luzzi, and performed by Daniela Meneses and the author. It opened on Saturday, 17 July 2010, in Valparaiso, Chile, where it will run through the first week of September. Set in Bethlehem, Paris, and Valparaiso, the play reflects the author's multicultural orientation, as a North American who studied in Australia and has acquired permanent residency in Chile.

Only *Passion for the Antarctic*, the third scene of *Tangled destinies*, deals with the frozen continent, and it is reminiscent of the one act play performed three years ago at the professional skills workshop organised by the Center (see Moore and León Wöppke 2008). An obsessive historian has not slept in days, trying to finish her book about *Tierra de O'Higgins*. This time she is interrupted by a stranger who embodies the least savoury aspects of his nation's 'enlightened self-interest' (see Gaddis 1987: 59).

As the Chilean character observers, it begs credulity that a publisher would dispatch someone to oversee the final revision of a manuscript. The success of theatre often hinges on the suspension of disbelief, and it can often be more effective when some things are left to the imagination. However, as this scene has been extracted from a larger work and is to be read rather than performed live, some elaboration seems warranted.

The North American 'imperialist' represents the historian's conscience, and thus their exchange constitutes her internal dialog with the past, reflecting her ambivalence toward, and strange attraction to, the United States. Rarely has the playwright felt such affection for one of his characters, and the ending makes her all the more irresistible in his perspective. Not only is she a true patriot and a serious academic; she is revealed to be as fallible as everyone else.

As Howkins (in press) writes in the preface to the bilingual collection of Moore's plays that is currently in press, theatre is capable of revealing many aspects of international relations that are often neglected by traditional forms of scholarship. The Center has chosen to publish the collection in the hope that it might reach both thespians and academics seeking novel ways in which to augment their lesson plans. A CD-ROM of *Passion for the Antarctic*, subtitled in English, is available upon request.

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Script

Passion for the Antarctic

Cast
JESSICA: historian of the Chilean Antarctic
STEVE: an uninvited guest

JESSICA: [*Enters reading her manuscript, notices Steve*.] Who are you?
STEVE: I'm with the publishers. There're a few changes that we'd like you to make.
JESSICA: They didn't mention anything about that.
STEVE: They told me that you'd deny it.
JESSICA: I can't believe they've sent you to help me. I've never heard of anything like that. Do you have a card?
STEVE: I'm sorry. I left them at the office. In any case, we don't like your attitude toward the United States Antarctic. That's why they sent me. We need to change your references to the 'so-called' United States Antarctic and the 'so-called' internationalisation proposal. Everything about my country you describe as 'so-called.' That's unacceptable.
JESSICA: The others are as Chilean as I am. Why would they care?
STEVE: They're much more open-minded and respect that we've explored more of the continent than any other country.
JESSICA: I've read that, but it has nothing to do with my book. How did you get in? I'm sure I locked the door.
STEVE: Really? It was open when I arrived.
JESSICA: What's your name?
STEVE: I'm not going to tell you that. You clearly don't trust me since I'm from the United States, and according to your book, nobody would've signed the Antarctic Treaty of 1959 if it hadn't included the Escudero Plan. The Escudero Plan wasn't that important.
JESSICA: It was the only chance we had of preventing you from declaring rights over the entire continent. Thank goodness it had that effect.
STEVE: We had every right to do so. Admiral Byrd discovered more of the continent than anyone else has, and he always encouraged the government to make a claim.

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JESSICA: But he was much less imperialistic than you and most of your fellow citizens. He visited us during one of his expeditions, and he greatly respected the Chilean position. He only wanted your government to declare its rights over the sector between New Zealand's and our own. That wouldn't have bothered us, but your government refused to accept it. It preferred to maintain the possibility of declaring its rights over the rest of the continent. How ironic that it never did so.
STEVE: It couldn't have done that without violating the Escudero Plan, which was only a strategy used against us. It deprived us of Palmerland, the territory that should be ours and ours alone.
JESSICA: It's called Tierra de O'Higgins, and our rights are much older.
STEVE: It's called Palmerland, and it's North American. Sooner or later the government will formalise our rights and have to recognise what a mistake it was to accept the Escudero Plan.
JESSICA: I still can't believe your government's opposition to the nuclear test ban, which was as important as the Escudero Plan. If the Argentines hadn't proposed it, you would've transformed the continent into the next Hiroshima.
STEVE: There's no evidence that my government was planning to test nuclear weapons in the Antarctic. That was only one possibility that we considered, like declaring our rights over the whole continent. The Antarctic Treaty is one of the worst documents that we've ever signed. It ignored our rights, and that was your government's fault. I've analysed the Escudero Plan for years and still haven't changed my opinion that it was only a conspiracy against our legitimate rights.
JESSICA: It reflects my country's devotion to the harmonious resolution of disputes, unlike yours. No doubt, the United States would've exploited the Antarctic in every way—militarily, economically, and otherwise. It's a society that never stops consuming,* and it only knows how to think of its own interests, which are usually opposed to those of everyone else, especially in Latin America. Though it might surprise you, we've never thought of you as our good neighbour, and we never will.
STEVE: We're the best neighbour you could hope for, and you have to recognise that our system functions much better than any other. The only reason why some people are always complaining about us is because they're jealous of our success and unable to follow our example. Your way of thinking seems very Marxist.
JESSICA: Your nation's example doesn't inspire anyone with a brain, much less a conscience. You don't have to be a Marxist to recognise that.
STEVE: You're welcome to believe whatever you want, and I don't care if you choose to think the worst of my country. I only have to correct your book.
JESSICA: I don't even know you.

* Admiral Richard E. Byrd reached a similar conclusion, fearing that his nation's 'reckless' consumerism had started to deplete its natural resources, for which reason he encouraged the government to formalise a claim to the Antarctic. Byrd 1947; United States 1976: 962.

STEVE: You only need to know that I'm from the United States, and it happens that my grandfather was involved with the formation of our Antarctic policy. He used to work for the State Department, and he told me everything.
JESSICA: So what? My book's about Chilean policy, not that of the United States or any other country.
STEVE: You shouldn't be so closed-minded.
JESSICA: I'm not, and someday I would like to talk to you about the U.S. policy. In the meantime I have to finish my book, and I don't need your assistance.
STEVE: You're exhausted. You need to go to bed.
JESSICA: And leave you with my book?
STEVE: Don't worry. We can talk about everything in the morning. Would you mind if I used the spare bedroom?
JESSICA: How do you know there is one?
STEVE: I saw it while you were at the university. It's a nice place. I like the paintings, and the wine cellar's to die for.
JESSICA: That's called trespassing.
STEVE: Your laws don't apply to me. I'm North American. How long have you been up?
JESSICA: I don't know exactly.
STEVE: Where do you want me to sleep—with you or in the spare bedroom?
JESSICA: I don't care.
STEVE: Don't you like men?
JESSICA: I like them very much.
STEVE: Then you should have no problem with what I've proposed. Or are you disappointed that I'm not as young as Hernán?
JESSICA: How do you know about him?
STEVE: I spoke with him when he stopped by. You shouldn't have given him your address. He's your student and you shouldn't forget that. I thought you were a serious academic.
JESSICA: I am. It's just that we've grown close since he shares my passion for the Antarctic. That's what he's writing his thesis about, and I'm directing it. That's the only reason I gave him my address.
STEVE: You wouldn't care about his 'passion for the Antarctic' if he weren't so young and infatuated with you. Have you ever been with a North American?
JESSICA: That's none of your business.
STEVE: I doubt you have, or you wouldn't be interested in Chileans. We North Americans are the best there is, as you're soon going to discover.
JESSICA: Though it might surprise you, I don't just sleep with anyone.
STEVE: I'm not just anyone. I'm a North American, and very few Chileans have been lucky enough to be with one of us. You should take advantage of the opportunity that I'm offering you. Or have you forgotten what to do with a man?
JESSICA: Of course not. This can't be happening. Did I really give my address to Hernán?
STEVE: You did, and he'll probably come back tomorrow. Anyone can see that he's completely infatuated with you, but he's your student and you shouldn't encourage him to confuse the relationship.
JESSICA: I know that. You're perfectly right. How embarrassing! [*Exits*.]

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