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FROM THE EDITOR

That's what he's going to look like. It was a muggy summer afternoon in Maine, and I was standing in an insufferably long line at an ice cream shop. If not for Zeke, my three-year-old, and his enthusiasm for frozen treats, the length of the queue would have been a deterrent. Slowly we inched our way to the counter. Eventually, we placed and received our order. As Zeke gleefully began to devour his sundae, a man standing far back in line excitedly pointed in our direction and shouted, "That's what he's going to look like!" The parlor went silent. Without moving from the line and with voice still raised, he explained that his sister was pregnant, her husband (and his brother-in-law) was a black man, and that the extended family could not imagine what this interracial, mixed, hybrid, in-between baby would look like. Zeke was a revelation to him.

This issue is dedicated to hybridity. Within the performing arts, there is a genuine, sincere, scream-out-loud enthusiasm for theatrical events that not only cross but also blur previously defined lines and boundaries. As scholars and artists meditate on what it means to live in a new millennial, allegedly postracial, increasingly technologically interconnected, and recognizably global society, it is self-evident that the performances and scholarship that we create need to be diverse, inclusive, multicultural, and multilingual. Unfortunately, even the most passionate advocates for theatrical hybridity can struggle to articulate what an integrated, or better yet, a mixed theatre would look like.

Hybridity, depending on your frame of reference, can be perceived as either a positive or negative value. On the one hand, it anchors itself in the scientific discourse of the nineteenth century and previous efforts to classify people, especially folks with darker skin tones, as belonging to another species. The idea of hybridity suggested innate difference and the potential for monstrous creation through intermixture. On the other hand (and for those interested in neither history nor theory), there is the new millennial fascination with hybrid bodies—from the Toyota Prius (a car) to Barack Obama (a man)—as being linked to the concept of "cool." This issue balances the bad with the good. It engages both the legacy of sexual assault that haunted biracial bodies during the era of legalized slavery within the United States and reveals the potential of a theatre praxis that privileges the indeterminate and mixed. This issue's contributors look back in time and spotlight moments of hybridity: the power of the appearance of mixed-race captive bodies within abolitionist performances, the possibilities that open up when differently complexioned and gendered artists play the *same* role, the ability of popular entertainment to attract a diverse audience across social class divisions, and the way that theatre criticism can enable comparisons of artists with differing ethnic identities and residing on opposite sides of an ocean.

Lisa Merrill centers her study on a set of performances involving biracial "actors" in the 1850s. The performance historian analyzes the spectacularization

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of mixed-race bodies as part of abolitionist campaigns. In addition, she demonstrates how individual bodies can activate everyday spaces into places of performance. Divided into three parts, or "acts," as Merrill calls them, her article explores the activities of William Wells Brown at the Crystal Palace, the first world's fair, in London; Henry Beecher Ward's recreation of the auction block in his Brooklyn, New York, church; and the lecture performances of Mary Webb. Brown staged an intervention at the London exposition by calling attention to his own recognizably racially mixed body and his status as a former slave. Beecher, presenting mixed-race fugitive women at his church, staged auctions in which congregants could purchase a young woman's freedom and, as he memorably proclaimed, save her from being "sold to a man who would rape her, sell her children for profit, and whip her if she put up resistance." Webb's one-woman elocutionary performance, an adaptation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe herself, created an opportunity for her to play a range of characters, both male and female, white and black, free and slave.

Uncle Tom's Cabin returns in Ariel Nereson's exploration of choreographer Bill T. Jones's 1990 production *Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land*. The article centers on a section of the dance performance featuring Stowe's character Eliza Harris, who famously jumped across ice floes to escape slavery in the novel. Five dancers—Andrea Woods, Heidi Latsky, Betsy McCracken, Maya Saffrin, and Gregg Hubbard—play Eliza and create multiple frames through which to see both the fictional Harris and the real-life Eliza Jane Johnson, whose escape across the ice fascinated Harriet Beecher Stowe. These varying interpretations, examples of "counterfactual" movement, repeatedly reintroduce Eliza Harris with a difference. In one moment, the character, who is described by Stowe as a "quadroon," is danced by a darker-complexioned African American performer and, in the next, by a white dancer. Eliza Harris's primary identity as "mother" gets tested when Hubbard, a man, plays her. In the slippage among Elizas as portrayed by the novelist and presented by Jones's dancers, Nereson persuasively notes that there is the potential to contemplate a more robust, multidimensional figure whose experiences might resemble those of Eliza Jane Johnson and women like her. Nereson writes, "Darkening Eliza extends the assumptions about her moral uprightness and emotional strength toward an alternative range of racialized and feminized bodies."

Chris Westgate spotlights the popularity of "slumming," the touristic visiting of working-class neighborhoods by the social elite. In his article, he spotlights Robert Neilson Stephens's play *On the Bowery* (1894), which brought the neighborhood saloon to the theatrical stage and gave the theatrical patron an opportunity to go "slumming" without having to leave the theatre. Part of the appeal of the play, in addition to the opportunity for vicarious travel, was the appearance of Steve Brodie, a local bar owner who achieved celebrity status for surviving a jump off the Brooklyn Bridge in 1886. Brodie's presence in the production attracted not only a "'Brodie audience,' the working-class spectators who crowded the gallery and boisterously cheered Brodie's every feat" but also a "'Booth audience,' the middle- and upper-class spectators who normally prized Edwin Booth's Shakespearean performances." In addition to addressing the popular appeal of

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the play, Westgate examines the importation of ethnic caricatures from the vaudeville stage into the production.

Stefka Mihaylova identifies playwrights Suzan-Lori Parks and Sarah Kane as "formalistlike" theatrical innovators whose writings in the 1990s merit closer consideration. Analyzing Parks's *Venus* and Kane's *Blasted*, she praises the artists for their "radical imaginations" and defends them against negative critiques that express a desire for an alignment with the conventions of realism. Mihaylova observes that "Kane's interviews reveal that she shared Parks's interest in writing drama that accounts for the formal distinctness of theatre, her suspicion of received narratives, and even her utopian view of theatre as a medium for shaping the future." In bringing together these two playwrights, the author demonstrates the value of addressing the form of dramatic works. Scholars have noted the contributions Parks has made to the study and expression of black experience. Investigations of Kane's work address her revelation of contemporary British identity in a manner similar to the Angry Young Men of a previous generation. Without discounting the value of these readings, Mihaylova introduces the additional insights gained from exploring the scaffolding, the structural composition, of plays designed by two prominent theatrical innovators.

This issue also features an interview with playwright Quiara Alegría Hudes. Hudes, who won the Pulitzer Prize for *Water by the Spoonful* and wrote the book for the Tony Award–winning musical *In the Heights*, is one of the leading figures of contemporary American theatre. Together, Hudes and I discuss a range of topics relating to the types of hybridity addressed by Merrill, Nereson, Westgate, and Mihaylova: the problem of socioeconomic isolation, the experience of living in a color-conscious society, and the importance of appreciating the formal elements that come together to create theatre.

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