

Remembering George

Jean Graham-Jones

In 2004 I edited my first special issue of *Theatre Journal*. As many of you know, *Theatre Journal* (*TJ*) is the flagship publication of the Association for Theatre in Higher Education, the United States' largest theatre studies organization, and as such the journal reaches over 3,000 potential readers. Seeking to deepen this largely generalist audience's engagement with our field, I'd always planned to devote the first issue to Latin American theatre, part of our collective mission—and I consider it a mission and I know I'm speaking to the converted collective here—of continuing to educate U.S. theatre scholars and practitioners about the other “American” theatre and performances taking place in and outside our hemisphere.

In the issue, along with *TJ*'s usual assortment of scholarly articles, book and performance reviews, and a forum on the state of Latin American theatre and performance studies in the U.S., I followed previous editor David Román's lead and included an “auto/archive,” which Román envisioned as senior scholars reflecting upon “their own particular relationship to the theatre... they have written about throughout their careers” (x).¹ For the special issue on Latin American theatre, the only auto/archivist I wanted was George. It wasn't easy: George, with that famous modesty of his, tried to get out of writing the piece. “Can't you find someone else?,” he asked in one of his delicious e-mails—I think he might have been traveling with Eleanor to Katmandu at the time. “I don't want anyone else,” I replied. And so we went back and forth, until finally I cajoled (and maybe even harassed) him into “just jotting some things down” by e-mail. What resulted was a reflective piece that not only beautifully balanced the personal and the professional but also traced the history of Latin American theatre studies in the U.S.

George's early work, like that of his peers such as Leon Lyday and Frank Dauster, clearly evinced the push to create a new U.S. scholarly disci-

pline out of what had been considered the bastard genre of Latin American literary studies and insert it into U.S. theatre studies and practice. After his dissertation, which he completed in 1967 at the University of Illinois under the direction of Merlin Forster and which bore the enormous umbrella title of “The Search for Identity: A Comparative Study in Contemporary Latin American Drama,” George published annotated critical bibliographies, reviews of published plays, and overview articles on individual playwrights and theatrical genres; he produced essay and translation collections; and he founded the field’s first U.S.-based journal—all signs of a discipline in formation. U.S. Latin American theatre studies was on its way. Today, *LATR* is not the only journal dedicated to our field. Today, languages, literatures, and theatre departments advertise for Latin American theatre specialists. Today, we can actually study Latin American theatre in a theatre or performance studies program. Today, we’re not the lonely Latin American theatre specialist in the room at meetings of such organizations as the Association for Theatre in Higher Education. Today, we speak of Latin American performance studies, in addition to theatre and dramatic literary studies. Today, Latin American theatre and performance are considered important components of the general field of theatre studies. We have George to thank for not only forming our discipline but fostering our current cross-disciplinary network.

In his auto/archive, however, George noted some important ongoing challenges for our field within the U.S. context. While since the 1960s Latin American theatre has gained a growing international profile, evident in festival participation, published translations, and production, as George put it, “the exception, ironically, is the United States, where the general American public is still resistant to things Hispanic” (549). Acknowledging the achievements of such U.S.-based theatre companies as Teatro Avante, George went on to call for “a more concerted effort in translation and promotion... to raise the level of awareness” (549). All of us in this room are fully engaged in promoting the production of Latin American theatre. Yet, I worry. In this era of the corporatized U.S. university and economy-driven “restructurings” that will weaken if not destroy liberal and arts education as we know it, the study of theatre itself is “a discipline under siege” (Carlson 117).² My CUNY colleague Marvin Carlson employs this phrase in a very distressing recent article on the current crisis in theatre higher education, and in the process he reminds us that the strongest theatre programs have historically had “strong ties across disciplines, especially with colleagues in the languages and literatures” (122). I think our beloved George would agree with me that in today’s climate it’s

even more urgent that our field maintain its very particular and rich cross-disciplinary network. I remember consulting George—didn't we all consult George?—when I was considering the move from a modern languages department to my current position in a theatre program. George said, "Go for it! We need to be everywhere." Let's keep it that way.

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Notes

¹ Past contributors have included Erika Fischer-Lichte, Herbert Blau, and Jorge Huerta.

² Carlson responds specifically to the State University of New York, Albany's closure of its theatre program and Cornell University's severe cutbacks, including 25 percent of the theatre program's budget. Spanish was the only language to escape Albany's cut.

Works Cited

- Carlson, Marvin. "Inheriting the Wind: A Personal View of the Current Crisis in Theatre Higher Education in New York." *Theatre Survey* 52.1 (May 2011): 117-23.
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- Woodyard, George. "The Theatre Journal Auto/Archive." *Theatre Journal* 56.3 (October 2004): 547-51.

