



KCACTF Newsletter

Issue 2

Region 2

QUESTIONS?

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The Sage of Baltimore

H.L. Mencken, one of the most important journalists in American history, was known as “The Sage of Baltimore.” He wasn’t a theater critic exactly, though he did have strong views on some performing arts: “Nine times out of ten, in the arts as in life, there is actually no truth to be discovered; there is only error to be exposed.” Mostly, he was a writer who, like a good critic, observed the world around him carefully and had the courage to write honestly about it. He was unafraid to offend people, even if that meant he took controversial stands

One of Mencken’s most famous quotations does relate rather directly to theater criticism:

“No one ever went broke underestimating the taste [or intelligence] of the American public.”

Mencken’s cynicism aside, we can view this statement as a call for good criticism. Who but the critics can help improve the taste and intelligence of the American public? Who but the critics will push theater artists to create great art that challenges the minds and hearts of their audiences? Critics are essential for the continued viability of the theater.

We can invoke the spirit of H.L Mencken (though that might not make him comfortable) this year as we gather just outside his beloved Baltimore for the O’Neill Critics Institute in Region 2. We can do this not only because he began his writing career in Baltimore at the age of many college students—age nineteen—but also because he committed himself to think carefully about what he observed and to write about it without fear. His credo could become the credo for all good critics:

“I believe it is better to tell the truth than a lie. I believe it is better to be free than to be a slave. And I believe it is better to know than to be ignorant.”

Like all great critics, Mencken wrote to improve the world he lived in by enabling people to see and compelling them to think.

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Call for Workshops

We still have room for workshops on any aspect of play analysis, production research or educational outreach at the 2010 Festival. To propose a workshop or discuss an idea for a session you might like to offer, contact Robyn Quick at rquick@towson.edu.

The O'Neill Critics Institute at the KCACTF-2 Festival

The O'Neill Critics Institute exists because we know that great critics aren't just born. As is the case with actors, designers, directors, playwrights and other theater professionals, they have to learn their craft. This is where OCI, the O'Neill Critics Institute, comes in. OCI is dedicated to help students learn and further develop their skills as critics. It helps them learn their craft so they can become good critics.

Every year at our Festival, students who sign up for OCI meet together with our Guest Critic in five or six sessions. Together, we talk about how to write good reviews, we watch the invited productions together, and we talk and write about the plays we have seen. Throughout the process, our Guest Critic gives invaluable feedback and insights to help the students learn how to write good reviews. It is an intense, exhausting, and exhilarating seminar in theater criticism! We create a close group in which everyone helps everyone else try to become better at this difficult craft.

In the last day of the festival, students turn in their best review, and our Guest Critic selects one student to go to the Kennedy Center and one student to be an alternate. More important than this, though, is the learning and growth that occurs during the OCI sessions. Students typically say that this is one of the most educational, most enjoyable experiences they have ever had.

Encourage your students who like to think about theater and who want to write about theater to join us. Also, please forward this to the English and Journalism departments on your campus and to the editors of your school paper. Save room on the bus for your critics when you come to the Festival.



Registration and What to Bring

Anyone can participate in OCI. A student does not need to be nominated by a respondent or anyone else.



We prefer, however, that students register ahead of time. This allows us to plan for space. It also allows us to send materials to students ahead of time if we need to. If our Guest Critic thinks that it would be helpful for students to read some material before they come to the Festival, we can get that information to the students.

The easiest way to register is to go to the KCACTF-2 website and use the registration form: <http://kcactf2.org/critics> and send it to Ralph Leary at leary@clarion.edu.

As is stated on the webpage, the most important things to bring are a love of theater and a desire to write about it. We also strongly encourage students to bring a laptop computer with wireless capability.

Most of their writing will be at night after they have seen the show. Towson University has a wireless network that we should be able to get guest access to. Not having a laptop with wireless capability may make the experience more difficult and frustrating. If students do not have such a laptop, they should see if they can borrow one from the school library, technology support office, or academic department.



Dramaturgy: A Marvelous Word



Dramaturgy is a marvelous word with multiple resonances that get at the heart of what theatre can do for an audience and what we as artists can do to create meaningful experiences for our audiences. In his recent book, *Toward a Dramaturgical Sensibility*, Geoff Proehl explores the various manifestations of dramaturgy in the theatre. He quotes dramaturg Brian Quirt's description of dramaturgy as, "the exploration of stories and how they are told in the theatre" in order to turn our attention to the ways in which a play functions. As theatre artists, we actively engage in the process of understanding the workings of a play and how we can bring its powers alive for an audience. In this sense, we are all dramaturgs. Yet often in the contemporary theatre there is also a member of the production team called the dramaturg, who takes a special responsibility for a range of tasks associated with bringing the world of the play to the world of the audience.

Dramaturgy at the KCACTF festival means all these things, as we support the development of dramaturgical skills – and a dramaturgical sensibility -- for all the artists who help to bring a play from the page to the stage. This year's festival will include workshops that will be of interest to a wide variety of student actors, technicians, designers, directors and playwrights.

For those students interested in how dramaturgy in the production process, we offer a range of workshops and other activities. Students can get first-hand dramaturgical experience at the festival by becoming "guerrilla dramaturgs" for the New Playwriting Program. They can also learn more about the art of production dramaturgy from our guest dramaturg who will hold a public review session of the entries in the Student Dramaturgy Initiative.

Guerrilla Dramaturgy

One exciting way to dive into the activities at our region 2 festival is through Guerrilla Dramaturgy. Our guerrilla dramaturgs receive a crash course in everything from production dramaturgy to theatrical collaboration to new play development – all in one activity! In cooperation with NPP, dramaturgs conduct research relating to a new play and then collaborate with a playwright, director and actors on a public reading of the play.

Guerrilla Dramaturgs do not need to bring anything to the festival other than intellectual curiosity and a desire for an exiting collaborative experience. A laptop is useful, but not required. Students can sign up to be guerrilla dramaturgs when they arrive at the festival. They will be given their assigned play the first night and will be part of that play's production team for the rest of the festival. The research will be done at the host school, using the resources of the library. Guerilla dramaturgs will also have ample time to participate in other workshops and festival activities.

Encourage your students to join the fun and become guerrilla dramaturgs at this year's Festival!

The Student Dramaturgy Initiative

Those who have already created dramaturgical projects on their campuses are encouraged to enter the Student Dramaturgy Initiative. Jointly sponsored by the Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas, The Association for Theatre in Higher Education and the KCACTF, this awards program is open to any student who serves as the dramaturg on a production or who submits a dramaturgy class assignment. All students who enter their material for consideration have the opportunity to talk about their work with our region's guest professional dramaturg in a public review session. That session then serves as a learning opportunity for anyone who wants to know more about effective production dramaturgy. Our regional winner will receive **\$100** and a **one-year membership in both ATHE and LMDA**. In addition, the student is invited to the Kennedy Center where he or she has the opportunity to work with professional dramaturgs at the national festival. For more information about entering work in the Student Dramaturgy Initiative visit our website at <http://www.kcactf2.org/dramaturgy.html>.

Dramaturgical opportunities abound for students at all levels of interest and experience, so come to the KCACTF festival and bring your dramaturgs!

We're on the
web!

www.kcactf2.org



We are updating our regional e-mail list and would like to include student e-mail leaders on our list. Please e-mail Juliet Wunsch at jwunsch@wcupa.edu with any new faculty or student leaders. Upcoming newsletters will spotlight different areas of our programming, so we'd love to update our e-mail list as soon as possible to ensure that everyone who wishes to receive our newsletter does. Newsletters will also be posted on our site after being e-mailed. Please feel free to forward this newsletter to anyone you think may be interested!



Thank you for reading the KCACTF Newsletter! I'm so happy and thankful to be working with Juliet Wunsch and the other staff members involved with making our Region's KCACTF a great success! I hope to keep you informed and up to date with the latest in festival happenings!!

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