

EDITOR'S COMMENTARY

Get Ready to Laugh, Cry, and Innovate: Latina Theater Works

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When we think of contemporary Latina/o/x playwrights, our thoughts will inevitably go to Lin Manuel-Miranda or even the master of monologues, John Leguizamo. It is unfortunate that so many Latina playwrights, showrunners, and screenwriters do not get the same kind of publicity or following that our hermanos do. We should also be thinking of folks like Aubrey Plaza, Tanya Saracho, Quiara Alegría Hudes, Carmen Rivera, *and* the incredible women represented in the pages of this fall issue of the journal.

Our Norma Elia Cantú Award winners couldn't be more different in their approach to theater works, but what they have in common is their excellent craft. Teresa Veramendi collaborated with a team of interviewers, interviewees, and creatives to produce "Santuario|Sanctuary," which captures the experiences of various folks who have crossed the United States-Mexico border and who have worked at the border. The result is an incredibly moving piece that humanizes folks who have had any experience with that part of the world. It is authentic, metaphorical, and universal, clearly drawing from the practices of Augusto Boal. Veramendi creates a sacred experience. Jenny Lídice Saldaña, coming from both a theater-trained background and the comic circuit, takes a less-than-holy approach with characters who are battling breast cancer and the perils of dating whilst aging. In "My Name Is (Jenny And Patrick)" the main character's love of musicals and her own

breasts, which are at risk because of the disease, cause her to revise an Ethel Merman classic, which exemplifies the Latinx tendency to break into song instead of completely breaking down. In “Bride Of Frankenboobie,” the speaker in the monologue, even in her worst grief over cancer, is able to make jokes that allude to the Mary Shelley classic. Saldaña, in “The Doña Effect (an excerpt),” keeps pushing us to see women as imperfect, complex, and fabulous, all at the same time, when the speaker makes an off-color joke about abortion, reminding us that women of every age are meant to have control over their bodies and be able to speak freely about that control, even in a joke, even when it is the most uncomfortable. This is all done as an aside to watching a strong, older woman date with confidence, never needing to fawn over anyone who might happen to recognize the beauty she knows she has.

We have two excellent voices that round out our focus on theater works in this issue. Adriana Dominguez, who teaches in the University of Texas-El Paso’s Department of Theater and Dance, focuses on Saraí, a young dancer, in “Jarabe.” Moments on the stage are affected by jarring realities that our young folks deal with on a regular basis, including mass shootings and immigration status, making the reader wonder if childhood is ever really the innocent time we like to imagine it to be. Michelle Elizabeth Navarrete blurs the lines between poetry and monologue with “Rituals,” a work that goes back and forth between English and Spanish, past and present, as a way of dealing with loss. The result is a beautifully captured feeling and homage to her mother.

I hope you enjoy these pieces as much as I did, and I hope they inspire you to look up more work by these artists, and by other important Latina playwrights and screenwriters.