

charles mee
the (re)making project

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What I like

My own work begins with the belief that human beings are, as Aristotle said, social creatures—that we are the product not just of psychology, but also of history and of culture, that we often express our histories and cultures in ways even we are not conscious of, that the culture speaks through us, grabs us and throws us to the ground, cries out, silences us.

I don't write "political plays" in the usual sense of the term; but I write out of the belief that we are creatures of our history and culture and gender and politics—that our beings and actions arise from that complex of influences and forces and motivations, that our lives are more rich and complex than can be reduced to a single source of human motivation.

So I try in my work to get past traditional forms of psychological realism, to bring into the frame of the plays material from history, philosophy, insanity, inattention, distractedness, judicial theory, sudden violent passion, lyricism, the *National Enquirer*, nostalgia, longing, aspiration, literary criticism, anguish, confusion, inability.

I like plays that are not too neat, too finished, too presentable. My plays are broken, jagged, filled with sharp edges, filled with things that take sudden turns, careen into each other, smash up, veer off in sickening turns. That feels good to me. It feels like my life. It feels like the world.

And then I like to put this—with some sense of struggle remaining—into a classical form, a Greek form, or a beautiful dance theatre piece, or some other effort at civilization.

—Chuck Mee

About the (re)making project

Please feel free to take the plays from this website and use them freely as a resource for your own work: that is to say, don't just make some cuts or rewrite a few passages or re-arrange them or put in a few texts that you like better, but pillage the plays as I have pillaged the structures and contents of the plays of Euripides and Brecht and stuff out of Soap Opera Digest and the evening news and the internet, and build your own, entirely new, piece—and then, please, put your own name to the work that results.

But, if you would like to perform the plays essentially or substantially as I have composed them, they are protected by copyright in the versions you read here, and you need to clear performance rights. For amateur performance rights, contact Lou Sender at sendercpa@gmail.com. For professional productions, contact Rachel Viola at United Talent Agency at violar@unitedtalent.com.

There is no such thing as an original play.

None of the classical Greek plays were original: they were all based on earlier plays or poems or myths. And none of Shakespeare's plays are original: they are all taken from earlier work. As *You Like It* is taken from a novel by Thomas Lodge published just 10 years before Shakespeare put on his play without attribution or acknowledgment. Chunks of *Antony and Cleopatra* are taken verbatim, and, to be sure, without apology, from a contemporary translation of Plutarch's *Lives*. Brecht's *Caucasian Chalk Circle* is taken from a play by Klabund, on which Brecht served as dramaturg in 1926; and Klabund had taken his play from an early Chinese play.

Sometimes playwrights steal stories and conversations and dreams and intimate revelations from their friends and lovers and call this original.

And sometimes some of us write about our own innermost lives, believing that, then, we have written something truly original and unique. But, of course, the culture writes us first, and then we write our stories. When we look at a painting of the virgin and child by Botticelli, we recognize at once that it is a Renaissance painting—that is it a product of its time and place. We may not know or recognize at once that it was painted by Botticelli, but we do see that it is a Renaissance painting. We see that it has been derived from, and authored by, the culture that produced it.

And yet we recognize, too, that this painting of the virgin and child is not identical to one by Raphael or Ghirlandaio or Leonardo. So, clearly, while the culture creates much of Botticelli, it is also true that Botticelli creates the culture—that he took the culture into himself and transformed it in his own unique way.

And so, whether we mean to or not, the work we do is both received and created, both an adaptation and an original, at the same time. We re-make things as we go.

The plays on this website were mostly composed in the way that Max Ernst made his Fatagaga pieces toward the end of World War I: texts have often been taken from, or inspired by, other texts. Among the sources for these pieces are the classical plays of Euripides as well as texts from the contemporary world.

I think of these appropriated texts as historical documents—as evidence of who and how we are and what we do. And I think of the characters who speak these texts as characters like the rest of us: people through whom the culture speaks, often without the speakers knowing it.

And I hope those who read the plays published here will feel free to treat the texts I've made in the same way I've treated the texts of others.

—Chuck Mee

A note on casting

I am an old crippled white guy in love with a young Japanese-Canadian-American woman, and we talk about race and age and polio and disability, but race and disability do not consume our lives. Most of our lives are taken up with love and children and mortality and politics and literature—just like anyone else.

My plays don't take race and disability as their subject matter. Other plays do, and I think that is a good and necessary thing, and I hope many plays will be written and produced that deal directly with these issues.

But I want my plays to be the way my own life is: race and disability exist. They are not denied. And, for example, white parents do not have biological black children. But issues of race and disability do not always consume the lives of people of color or people in wheel chairs. In my plays, as in life itself, the female romantic lead can be played by a woman in a wheel chair. The male romantic lead can be played by an Indian man. And that is not the subject of the play.

There is not a single role in any one of my plays that must be played by a physically intact white person. And directors should go very far out of their way to avoid creating the bizarre, artificial world of all intact white people, a world that no longer exists where I live, in casting my plays.

—Chuck Mee