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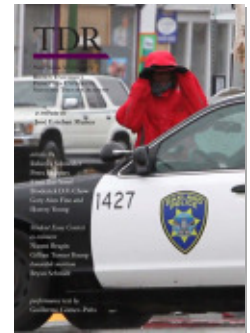
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## **Shattered and Fucked Up and Full of Wreckage: The Words and Works of Charles L. Mee**

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# Mee on Mee

*analysis interview manifesto chronology*



# Shattered and Fucked Up and Full of Wreckage

The Words and Works of Charles L. Mee

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*Erin B. Mee*

## *An Introduction*

A woman pours gin, vermouth, and olives on a plastic sheet and slides around on it, licking the sheet with her tongue. A Louis XVI chair rises slowly from beneath the stage while a disembodied voice confides: “Denys always said that Vera had eaten human flesh when she was in Borneo.” A bride in a full-length wedding gown hurls herself at the floor repeatedly, yelling: “Men. You think you can do whatever you want with me, think again.” A 75-year-old woman pulls her skirt down and does a naked-butt dance. This is the world of Charles Mee. He doesn’t write psychologically based narrative dramas. He doesn’t write “literature that walks”—plays where everything that happens is subservient to the text. He writes blueprints for events. For spectacles. For festivals.

I’ve been asked to interview him and to write this introduction to his work because I’ve directed several of his plays. And because I’m his daughter. I’ve sat on the knee of the master, and could I tell you stories...

When my father writes a play, he often starts with a familiar story; usually, but not always, a Greek myth—*The Oresteia*, *Hippolytus*, *The Bacchae*, *The Trojan Women*, *The Suppliant Women*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*—and then he elaborates on it (see the Chronology for a complete list of all Mee productions). My father is unfamiliar with the South Indian dance-drama *kuttiyattam*, but his plays share the same structure. *Kuttiyattam* dramatizes, elaborates on, and plays with, stories from the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*—stories the audience already knows. The emphasis of the performance is not on what the story is (the plot) but on how it is told—what the performers bring to it, what they make of it. A *kuttiyattam* performer may spend up to three hours illuminating three lines of text by making political and social analogies, exploring emotional associations, and telling related or background stories. In other words, the performer’s job is to make the familiar epic new, and to make it relevant—to tell the story in such a way that it

1. *Playwright, director,  
historian, father,  
Charles L. Mee (Photo by  
Laurie Williams)*

## the (re)making project

*Please feel free to take the texts from this website and use them as a resource for your own work: cut them up, rearrange them, rewrite them, throw things out, put things in, do whatever you like with them—and then, please, put your own name to the work that results.*

*But, if you would like to perform the texts as I have written them, they are protected by copyright in the versions you read here, and you need to clear performance rights with ICM, 40 W. 57th Street, New York, New York, 10019, attention Sam Cohn—or get in touch with Libby Edwards by phone at 212-556-6881, by fax at 212-556-6781, by email at <asst\_kooij@icm Talent.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<sup>1</sup> 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,<sup>2</sup> 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 it is 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 remake things as we go.

The plays on this web site 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  
<www.charlesmee.org>

### Notes

1. Thomas Lodge wrote *Rosalynde*, printed in 1590, which was Shakespeare's source for *As You Like It*.
2. Klabund, also known as Alfred Henschke, was a writer and ballad singer. His version of the chalk circle story was staged by Max Reinhardt at the Deutsches Theatre.

says something about the world we live in today. My father does something very similar. He takes a Greek myth and elaborates on it. In kuttiyattam the elaboration is nonverbal—it is “spoken” physically, through gesture. It is visual. A kuttiyattam performance of a 12-page play can take anywhere from 5 to 38 nights to perform. On the final night the play—the written text—is performed in its entirety. The text is anywhere from 1/5 to 1/38 of the experience. Similarly, my father writes text for a performance in which what he has written will be a fraction of the total experience. He sets up a situation that requires the director, in turn, to elaborate on what he has written.

Therefore, as a director I can’t simply illustrate what my father has done; I have to meet the text with other elements—dance, music, painting. I’m not just *allowed* to bring my ideas to the production; I’m *expected* to do so. Which is what I love about directing my father’s plays.<sup>1</sup> I get to be who I am: a creative artist, not an interpretive artist. My father wouldn’t try to close down *Endgame* because JoAnne Akalaitis hasn’t followed his stage directions word for word. My father wouldn’t ask the Wooster Group to “cease and desist” from staging parts of *The Crucible* in ways he didn’t originally envision.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, in *The Imperialists at the Club Cave Canem*, my father gives up his authority. *The Imperialists* calls for two performance pieces to be inserted between the three scenes he has written. He leaves it to the director to decide who will “write” 40 percent of the play. At one level this is no big deal: all his plays are collages in that he takes texts from all over the place and inserts them into his plays; then he extends the idea of collage to include not just appropriated text, but songs, dance, performance art, and images from painting. So a production of *The Imperialists* is just a further extension of what he’s already doing at the level of playwriting.

At another level my father’s openness is radical. Most artists who use collage retain control over what’s put into the collage; they construct the collage (or montage) themselves. My father is different. He invites other people to cowrite the collage—without knowing, and therefore without having any control over, what they will do. I know of no other playwright who collaborates in this way.

When we did *The Imperialists* in 1988 the performance artists rotated; we had different performers every two weeks. Tori Chickering tap-danced while playing the tuba, the Alien Comic did a prop-filled monologue, the Second Hand Dance Company kicked themselves in the butts rhythmically with wooden clackers, and Liz Prince, dressed in a 1920s flapper outfit with cigarette butts for fringe, sang a torch song. When we revived *The Imperialists* in the spring of 2001, Jessica Rylan Can’t, a noise musician, played the radio as an instrument as well as her own homemade “noise box”; and members of the band Neptune walked through the darkened theatre while prerecorded text issued from speakers in their lit mouths. Each new performance piece drastically changed the feel of the evening. And that was part of the point. Only two of my father’s other plays (*The Constitutional Convention* and *The War to End War*) specifically call for inserted performance pieces. But all of his plays, to a greater or lesser degree, require the director and the performers to cowrite the event.

My father’s plays are full of “Brechtian” reversals—familiar things made strange. “Why can’t a man be more like a woman?” intones Thyona in *Big Love*, reversing one of the signature numbers of *My Fair Lady*. “What do you think caused your heterosexuality?” asks Red Dicks in *True Love*. “When did you decide you were a heterosexual? [...] Do your parents know you’re straight? What do men and women do in bed together?” These and other similar disruptions ask anyone attending a “Mee” production to notice the way we speak, and to question the assumptions underlying our daily exchanges.

My father’s plays are full of excess. In *First Love* Edith doesn’t throw one plate in rage, she throws 100. In *True Love* Nikos and Constantine slam themselves onto

2. Rob Bessener in Vienna: Lusthaus, choreographed and directed by Martha Clarke, produced by Music Theatre-Group, 1986. (Photo by Gary Gunderson)



the stage floor (and at each other) over and over and over and over and over again, yelling, “Fuck these women” and “Little League was never for me” until they are drowned out by music, and finally subside. In *The Constitutional Convention* three performance pieces erupt one after the other, crashing into the structure of the play and hijacking the plot. There is a sense of release in these excesses—a whoosh of freedom as characters break the rules of etiquette, of propriety, of the well-made play.

There is always “excessive” speech. Like kuttiyattam, or musical comedies, or opera, my father’s plays feature arias—moments where the plot stops, allowing a character to thoroughly and deeply explore an idea or feeling before the play moves on. In *True Love* Shirley talks about love nonstop for five minutes—a long time in the theatre. She free-associates through numerous permutations, combinations, contradictions, and examples of her thesis that “love is how you relate to people” and that the way you express your love is who you are.

In fact, the characters in my father’s plays rarely dialogue. They monologue. They speechify. In *The Imperialists* three burnt-out couples lie in bed. Molly rhapsodizes about a man who killed himself with his pants; Peter retaliates with a “story with a moral.” At warp speed, Karen chain-talks her way through a list of the rich and famous she has met; Peter falls into a rapture over Louis XVI. Karen and David lie amid the ruin of beer cans and two-day-old Chinese food. David tells a story about people in Africa whose lips are so long they have to walk backward over their food; Karen tells a story about wandering into the middle of a performance piece and realizing she was part of the act. None of these characters speak to each other. They speak at, or past, one another. This breakdown of communication—symptomatic of the world we live in—is, in part, the subject of *The Imperialists*. It’s called *The Imperialists* because these characters don’t have their own experiences: they appropriate what they’ve seen on the Discovery channel or read in the supermarket tabloids; they colonize other people’s lives and stories. “Often I hear something and I remember it and I think it happened to me,” says Karen. This is the end of an empire, the end of civilization, the end of conversation, and the end of the well-made play.

At this point, when civilization is in ruins, when so many rules have been broken, out of the wreckage, out of the chaos, rise the performance pieces:

beautiful, quirky, unique expressions of humankind. At this moment, there is room for outrageous, unusual people to have their say and perform their acts. People who have had no place in the conventional theatre, people who have been excluded from the mainstream, are put onstage, given a platform from which to speak. And that, finally, is what is most important about my father's work. He makes room for the marginalized, the rejected, and the outsider.

In *The Imperialists*—as in many of my father's other plays—the form is the meaning. One of my father's principal qualities is in being open to other's contributions—both structurally, and in terms of content. He goes out of his way to make a place for “other” people in his work. He says it in the interview that follows, but it is worth repeating here: “One of the strategies of my plays is to extend the boundaries of what's considered normal and acceptable for what it is for a human being to be.” To be able to do that effectively is his biggest gift.

ERIN: You write plays in groups: there's the tetralogy (*Investigation of the Murder in El Salvador*, *The Constitutional Convention*, *The Imperialists at the Club Cave Canem*, and *The War to End War*), the love plays (*First Love*, *Big Love*, *True Love*), *Summertime* and *Wintertime*, and your adaptations of Greek plays.

CHUCK: I don't think I write plays the way playwrights write plays. I think I write plays the way painters paint paintings. Van Gogh did sunflowers: he didn't do one painting of a sunflower; he did many paintings of sunflowers, of fields of sunflowers, over and over again—more and more fields, this kind of field and that kind of field, in this kind of light and that kind of light. Painters do this all the time: they use the same subject matter; they reuse the same images in one painting after another. And I do that.

I went to school in Euripides and Shakespeare and Brecht, but I also feel I've gone to school in art galleries. I've learned structure, ways of thinking and looking, how to work...

ERIN: And your plays are collages. You take text from the letters of Simone de Beauvoir, *The National Enquirer*, transcripts of the trial of the Menendez brothers, *Warren Buffett Speaks*, Leo Buscaglia, *The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon*, *Vogue*, texts posted on the internet, *Male Fantasies*, *W*, Elaine Scarry, Valerie Solanas's *SCUM Manifesto*, and *Soap Opera Digest*.<sup>3</sup> And you've said you compose your plays the way Max Ernst composed his *Fatagaga* pieces<sup>4</sup>...

CHUCK: Max Ernst is the originator, I guess, of the modern collage. What Ernst did, in effect, is what I'm saying I'd like to do: he took scissors and he cut texts out of daily newspapers and catalogues of other things, and then he rearranged them on a page and glued them down and did a little drawing and painting around them to make them into his view of something. So, in effect, he took the unedited material of the real world and rendered it as hallucination. And that's what I think I'm doing all the time. I think Max Ernst is my dramaturg.

ERIN: That may be true, but the impulse for your own collages came from writing history books.

CHUCK: When I went back to writing plays in the mid '80s, [see the Chronology: my father wrote plays in the early '60s, quit and wrote history books, and then, in the '80s, returned to playwriting] I had just been writing history. Historians pick up documents from the time they live in, they quote sources, they quote documents, they insert into their texts unedited pieces of evidence of the real world, and I'm still thinking in that mode. So I thought, rather than process something as a writer—which is to say run it through my sensibilities so that it comes out differently—how would it be if I just took it unedited—raw—

ERIN: The three “love plays” share bits of text—lines, phrases, and even a speech or two appears in more than one play.

CHUCK: Yes. Painters do that all the time, and playwrights are never supposed to do that. One of the reasons playwrights can’t do that is that every word a character onstage says is supposed to come from their unique, psychological, individual history. If you think characters can also speak the culture, then more than one character can speak the same text in a different play. Only you and I and two other people are ever going to notice that, or know what it means, but that’s the idea.

from the world. Then, as a writer, I struggle with how you take stuff that you’ve stolen from the world and make it work as a play.

But I find that struggle interesting. That obstacle has forced me to come up with other strategies for making a play. It forced me to write a different kind of play. That was interesting to me. But the initial impulse was to put pieces of the world onto the stage without smoothing out the rough edges, running it through my interpretive frame, or making it smooth and easy to listen to, and see what that got me.

Then, as I thought about it over the years—you know, there’s a lot of French literary theory about who authors something, whether there’s a unique author, or the culture authors it and the author is just the medium through whom the culture speaks, blah, blah, blah. I guess what I think finally is that both things are true: that the culture creates the individuals, and the individuals

create the culture. For example, you’d never mistake a play by Ben Jonson for a play by Shakespeare. But you’d also never mistake an Elizabethan play for a Greek play because the culture creates a kind of play.

I think that people move back and forth along this continuum between the public, the historical, the cultural, and their own unique filters. And it has always been important to me to keep a grip on the public, the cultural, the historical. This forces you to come to terms with the world you live in. You can’t internalize everything and turn it all into your own private view of things, because you’re not alone in the world. So it forces a play not to be about only the internal, psychological lives of characters. It forces a play not to say, with Freud: if we understand a character’s early childhood family psychodynamics, we understand the character. It forces you to say: no, human beings are formed by history and culture, by politics and economics, genetics and gender—all these things that come unedited into the play. And so you have a richer view of how it is to be alive, of what makes the world the way it is today, and what makes human beings what they are. This is the model that the Greeks and Shakespeare worked out of—which has been lost in 20th-century American theatre, where so much is thought to be explained if you explain the psychology of the character. So that even plays which seem to be political, and seem to be about somebody wanting a certain political or social change, make you ask yourself: Hasn’t he become a revolutionary figure because he’s an unhappy, fucked-up individual who had a mean father? If he had had a nice childhood he’d be happy, and we could go on

## Notes toward a Manifesto

2002

Charles L. Mee

If Aristotle was right  
that human beings are social animals  
that we create ourselves in our relationships to others,  
and if theatre



with society the way it is today. So you never have to grapple with the politics of the character.

I like the idea that if you show the truth of human life, you are inherently showing that human beings are not condemned to live the lives they've always lived. And that's the way in which I think I write political plays. I don't write issue plays that have an answer to a political or social problem of the day. I write plays that really speak, at a different level of engagement, about what it is to be a human being and what is possible for a human being to be. What I try to do is mobilize more causes, or more places, in which the human character originates.

ERIN: The characters in your plays are not like onions—you don't peel away the layers until you reveal the underlying psychological motivating force that explains everything they do. The characters in your plays are like smashed pots: if you pick up any one shard of pottery, it doesn't look like it has anything to do with the other shards lying around, but if you were to glue all the pieces back together, they would make a (more or less) coherent pot. And each of those shards is a different motivating force.

At another level, each shard is a piece of text that has come from a different source. Character, then—who a person is—is an assemblage of bits of history, pop culture, philosophy, etc. (And in that sense your characters are also like archaeological finds: they say something—both literally and figuratively—about the culture.) Your characters are not only *composed* of these disparate chunks of culture, they *speak* these chunks of text, but they don't speak them as if they are quoting, for example, Warren Buffet—they speak as if they are saying these words for the very first time.

CHUCK: I believe that the culture speaks through us without our even knowing it. Often we'll get into a conversation and we'll deliver a passionately held set of convictions about the goodness of the President or the evil of some guy who punched up a hockey father in Boston,<sup>5</sup> and think it's something we really believe, when really it's something we got off of NBC. So that people go around speaking stuff that they think is their stuff, when they're basically quoting Jerry Springer or the *National Enquirer* or some political philosopher whose writing they've seen on a subway poster somewhere. So I think that's a part of who we are. That's not surrealism or expressionism, it's...realism.

ERIN: In rehearsal for *First Love*,<sup>6</sup> Ruth [Maleczek] disagreed with you. Ruth feels people are conscious of the fact that they are quoting Jerry Springer, so she made an effort to play those chunks of found text consciously. She often played them as if her character was playing, or taking on—consciously taking on—a different persona. And it worked. Ruth says she doesn't believe in character, so her performance was one in which she didn't erase inconsistencies or contradictions or things that seemed not to fit in order to create a character, but embraced

is the art form that deals above all others in human relationships,  
then theatre is the art form, par excellence,  
in which we discover what it is to be human  
and what it is possible for humans to be.

Whatever else it may do,  
a play embodies a playwright's belief about how it is to be alive today,  
and what it is to be a human being—  
so that what a play is about,  
what people say and how things look onstage,

3. *The cast of Full Circle, directed by Robert Woodruff at the American Repertory Theatre, spring 2000. (Photo by Richard Feldman)*



and took advantage of them. Which means she found a way to perform the collage you wrote. But I've watched other actors struggle with the diverse "voices" they have to encompass, and I wonder what advice you have for them.

CHUCK: My advice is probably useless. I think actors should throw themselves into the ocean of text in the same way that I throw myself into this ocean of material that comes into my plays, and just somehow trust that their instincts and thoughts will sort it all out for them. If you try to apply any one set of standards to understanding it, that's reductionist; you'll probably work against it. If you try to work intellectually, you'll lose; if you try to understand it psychologically, you'll lose; if you try to understand it as a political argument, you'll lose. But if you throw yourself into the middle of all those things that are at play, then your intelligence—which includes your head and your heart and your neurons and your cells—will work it through for you.

ERIN: What you're advocating is a multiconscious approach to your work. Ruth took a superconscious approach, and she was brilliant in the role. But her superconscious approach created a character who was in turn superconscious of everything she did, which meant she was in control of everything she did. And

and, even more deeply than that,  
how a play is structured,  
contain a vision of what it is to have a life on earth.

If things happen suddenly and inexplicably,  
it's because a playwright believes that's how life is.  
If things unfold gradually and logically,  
that's an idea about how the world works.  
If characters are motivated by psychological impulses  
that were planted early in a character's life in her childhood home,

that's the opposite of what you've written. Your theory—manifest in what you write and how you write it—is that we are not always in control of what we think, of what we say, of what we do, and of what happens to us.

CHUCK: Often the speeches I write are shot through with life. And life can suddenly change. You can suddenly have a virus that alters your entire life. Suddenly a plane hits the World Trade Center and your life changes. This happens not just in the world of a play, but in our hearts and minds. These are the cross-currents or crosswinds (as an airline pilot might say) that come through our lives.

ERIN: And sometimes you don't even control the way you feel. You have been heavily influenced by Joseph Chaikin's theory of random emotion. Can you repeat here what Chaikin said to you about emotion?

CHUCK: What Chaikin said, and what appears as a speech by Dionysus in my version of *The Bacchae*, is: "I think there are things that everyone feels at least once every 15 minutes: embarrassment, for example, or humiliation, from nowhere, without apparent cause; sudden grief, anxiety, dread, distraction—as though a spirit or monster of some kind had passed overhead; regret, impatience, hatred, and unreasoning rage. It's not the same for everyone. Some people I know feel none of those things, but instead, every 15 minutes they feel vengeful, jealous—they are immobilized by envy, a longing to possess something or someone, greed, lust, a wish to put something in their mouths.

ERIN: And can you describe Chaikin's "15-minute" exercise? You have internalized this exercise, and worked it into your plays, so I've found it useful in rehearsal; it helps the actors deal with the sudden, unexplained shifts your characters take.

CHUCK: Joe got a group of people together—a few directors, some actors, a few writers—for a laboratory of pure research. And Chaikin made the remark above, and then we got a couple of actors on their feet, and set a situation for them to improvise with. And every once in a while someone would call out "envy" or "vengefulness" and one of the actors would let that random emotion go through their performance. In this way, their performances—and the scene itself—were occasionally hit with random emotion-laden crosswinds. And we all saw that these random emotions, far from making the scene seem weird, made it seem more like the lives we all live, where we are always in a situation of having a cup of tea with a friend when, suddenly, for no reason at all, unattached anger wells up in us, or a sense of having been slighted, something that doesn't come from the present moment at all but from some other relationship or past history.

And, in this way, I think I was impressed, again, by the randomness of life; and how most theatrical conventions rule that out, and so sterilize human interactions and human life—make it artificial, unreal, and a little dead.

it's because a playwright believes  
that's what causes people to do the things they do the way they do them.  
Or,  
if a character is motivated by other things, in addition,  
or even primarily motivated by other things—  
by the cumulative impact of culture and history,  
by politics and economics,  
by gender and genetics and rational thought and whim,  
informed by books and by the *National Enquirer*,  
given to responses that are tragic and hilarious,

CHUCK: Some of my other plays seem a whole lot more, as it were, finished and controlled and scripted, completely scripted, like most people's plays. But usually, even within the plays that I script more completely, I almost always leave stage directions that say, "Now this could happen or that could happen or something else could happen"—and that's up to the directors. With *bobrauschenbergamerica* Anne Bogart said: Wouldn't it be nice if we tour the piece, if the people of the community had some part in it? And I thought: Yeah. So I stuck in a place, a sort of holding place for that idea. A 125-piece marching band marches through the middle of the piece. Get the local high school kids in the piece—just in one door of the theatre and out the other. I still think that would be fabulous, although we've never done it. And other stuff might happen. I don't know, maybe 42 babies in baby carriages will come through, singing "Happy Birthday."

ERIN: And as a playwright you choose not to control what happens to your plays after you write them. In *the (re)making project* [see *the (re)making project* box] you invite—in fact you encourage—people to appropriate material from your plays in the same way you appropriate material from the culture.

CHUCK: I use the culture unedited at the front end, and then at the back end I complete what I did at the front end: I place my plays on the Internet for other people to take and rewrite and make into whatever they want to make from them. So it's an open system of participating in the culture that's bigger than you are, that you sort of give yourself to, and that you understand you don't control. And that feels good because it feels real. I've made myself open and vulnerable to the world and what happens to my work in the same way that the trauma of polio rendered me helpless and vulnerable and unable to control my own body. In some way, the way I work reproduces the conditions of that trauma, and it feels good to go back there and do it on purpose.

All my plays are available on the Internet [at <[www.charlesmee.org](http://www.charlesmee.org)>], and every day, 100 people download my plays—from all over the world: Hong

Kong, France, Germany, Japan, India, and Turkey. A play of mine was done in Serbia while the United States was bombing Serbia. So people take my stuff and do it everywhere. And what I really hope is that people aren't just taking my plays, taking out the dirty words, making them acceptable for a middle-American audience, and attributing them to me. What I really hope is that they're using these texts as resources in the way I've used Euripides and Shakespeare—that they remake it, reuse it, cut it up, and make their own piece to which they put their own names. [Robert] Woodruff had a plan—I don't know if he's going through with it, but he had a plan—to take *True Love*, which is based on the Phaedre story, and a Sarah Kane text based on the same story, and a couple of others, make his own text with students at the ART Institute, and take that production to Moscow.<sup>8</sup> That's the kind of thing I hope people will do.

ERIN: In *The Imperialists* you set up the conditions of *the (re)making project* within the play itself, by calling for "a performance piece" between each of the scenes.

conscious and unconscious, ignorant and informed at the same time—  
it's because the playwright believes  
this complex of things is what makes human history happen.

Most of the plays I grew up seeing didn't feel like my life.  
They were such well-made things,  
so nicely crafted, so perfectly functioning in their plots and actions and endings,  
so clear and clearly understood,  
so rational in their structures,  
in their psychological explanations of the causes of things.

In this way, you ask other people to cowrite the event. And because you don't specify anything about those performance pieces, you never know what they will be, or what they will do to the play. You leave your plays open to chance—to the chance encounter between your scripted play and someone else's performance art piece. How does that feel?

CHUCK: I love it. I just love that. I love it. I give the piece over to a world that I don't control, and stuff happens that's uncontrollable, which seems consistent with the idea that you import stuff into the text of the piece that you didn't control, that you didn't imagine and you didn't make up, and you don't edit it to make it come out right or nice or easy to handle in a play. You make it difficult for yourself when you throw the real world into it. And then you turn around and you ask the production to leave it uncontrollable. So I throw myself into a world that I don't entirely control. That seems like life to me. That just seems like life.

ERIN: And finally—unlike Beckett—you make no effort to control what directors do with your work.

CHUCK: Eventually we all die and we lose control over our work. If the stuff you left is worth anything at all, then people will take it and mess with it. If you're lucky, that's what will happen after you die: people will do your plays, but they'll do them however the fuck they want. If you're not lucky, nobody will do anything with your plays, and they'll be neglected. It seems silly to me to try to preserve control over my work for the comparatively tiny time I can. Plus, I'm eager to see what will be done after I'm dead and gone and no longer have any control over what people do. Plus, I'm not a person who thinks there's a definitive version of anything—of civilization, of a history book, or of a production of a play. Plus, I've always thought the playwrights who get the best productions are the dead playwrights, so I thought it might be best to behave like one.

ERIN: In my experience you often “play dead” by not saying anything about what you've written unless I ask a question, or by not coming to rehearsal unless I call and ask you to come.

CHUCK: Right, because then it's up to the director and actors to make a piece with the text, which is the most exciting thing because then the people in the rehearsal room don't feel bound, in some deadening fashion, to replicate the definitive version of a playwright's intentions. They feel free to be creators themselves, and to remake the text into a theatrical event. I think you feel that energy in a production, when the directors and actors have been free to do their thing without inhibition.

And my life hadn't been like that.  
 When I had polio as a boy, my life changed in an instant and forever.  
 My life was not shaped by Freudian psychology;  
 it was shaped by a virus.  
 And it was no longer well made.  
 It seemed far more complex a project than any of the plays I was seeing.  
 And so,  
 in my own work,  
 I've stepped somewhat outside



4. Karenjune Sanchez, Carolyn Baeumler, and Aimee Guillot in *Big Love*, directed by Les Waters at the Actors Theatre of Louisville, spring 2000. (Photo by Richard Trigg)

ERIN: This seems like a good time to talk about your work with the SITI Company. You've recently become a member of the SITI Company, and you wrote *bobrauschenbergamerica* for them. What was that process like?

CHUCK: The way the SITI Company makes theatre is they create an event which has a space within it for text to live. They do not stage a text. So I knew with the SITI Company that I could write a line or two of stage directions and they would create an event out of it because that's what they do. I'm always thinking about the event when I write. I never write a word until I can imagine an event. I see that happening and then I hear text, or I look for text that would look good in that space. And then, it's true, I usually describe the physical space in some detail in my stage directions. Or the kind of physical event it is. Which directors usually change. But I've indicated to the director the sort of space it is and the sort of dramaturgical rules that apply, and then they get to rewrite the rules all they want.

ERIN: You told me that Barney Hanlon wanted to dance, so you put in a dance for him.

CHUCK: Right, a square dance, which he choreographed. It's fun to write for performers when you know exactly what they want to do, and when you know the sensibility and temperament of the director, and you know what will please

the traditions of American theatre in which I grew up  
to find a kind of dramaturgy that feels like my life.  
And I've been inspired a lot by the Greeks.  
I love the Greeks  
because their plays so often begin with matricide and fratricide,  
with a man murdering his nephews and serving the boys to their father for  
dinner. That is to say, the Greeks take no easy problems,  
no little misunderstanding that is going to be resolved  
before the final commercial break at the top of the hour,



5. Ruth Maleczech and Frederick Neumann in *First Love*, directed by Erin B. Mee at the New York Theatre Workshop, fall 2001. (Photo by Joan Marcus)

them and what will thrill them and the jokes that they can tell—their sense of humor. With *First Love*, since I know your sense of humor and I know what delights you, I knew what I could put in, what little turns I could take that you would find delightful. Therefore, when you stage them, they will be delightful, or you will find the delight in them, so that affects me a lot as I write.

With *bobrauschenbergamerica*, I said to Anne, let's do a piece about Bob Rauschenberg, and she said great. So we got together a group of people for a playwriting workshop. I looked at Rauschenberg's work and made a list of images that kept recurring in his work, like a chicken and an astronaut and stuff like that. And I thought, What does that make me think of? Who do I hear talking? I hear a chicken farmer. I hear chicken jokes. So I made a list of all this stuff, I made a list of 23 scenes or events or things that could happen onstage: an astronaut walks across the stage while somebody tells a joke about a chicken crossing the road. I handed out a copy of the list to everyone before the workshop, and said: This could be the first 23 scenes of a piece, now you make a list of the first 23 scenes of a piece and we'll bring those in. And I said: Don't bring in anything you don't want me to steal, because I'm going to steal, and you feel free to steal anything you want, too. Anything I have, you can steal. So those were the rules of the game.

And people brought stuff in—interesting ideas for scenes, and some pieces of

no tragedy that will be resolved with good will,  
 acceptance of a childhood hurt,  
 and a little bit of healing.  
 They take deep anguish and hatred and disability  
 and rage and homicidal mania and confusion and aspiration  
 and a longing for the purest beauty  
 and they say:  
 here is not an easy problem;  
 take all this and make a civilization of it.



6. Laurie Williams and the cast of *True Love*, directed by Daniel Fish at the Zipper Theatre, fall 2001. (Photo by Carol Rosegg)

text. And we talked about who Rauschenberg was and what he was about, and the feeling of it, and what the politics were. And they went home that night, and their job was to bring in 23 new scenes, and a few pieces of text for some of those scenes, whatever scenes they wanted to write. So this is like, what? Ten people and 23 scenes is 230 scenes, plus each of them writing three pieces of text, so that's 30 pieces of text, and it was wonderful. And I stole all that stuff and stuck it in and remade it. And then we all went up to Skidmore where the SITI Company always does a residency. And the students there did all this composition work based on the text I had. And then I came home from Skidmore, and thought: Oh God, this is just going to become a miscellaneous anthology of associations with Rauschenberg. How do I decide what I'm going to do? Then I thought: what would Rauschenberg do? He just took whatever he thought was cool. So I composed a text out of that, and that became the finished script.

ERIN: I want to jump back to the connection between polio and your work—the connection you make, in your memoir *A Nearly Normal Life*, between your body and your body of work, which I will quote:

I find, when I write, that I really don't want to write well-made sentences that have a sense of wholeness and balance, books that feel intact. Intact people should write intact books with sound narratives built of sound par-

And the forms in which they cast their theatre were not simple.  
 Unlike Western theatre since Ibsen,  
 which has been essentially a theatre of staged texts,  
 the Greeks employed spectacle,  
 music, and dance or physical movement,  
 into which text was placed  
 as one of the elements of theatre.  
 The complexity and richness of form  
 reflected a complexity and richness of understanding  
 of human character and human history.



agraphs that unfold with a sense of dependable cause and effect, solid structures you can rely on. I like a book that feels like a crystal goblet that has been thrown to the floor and shattered, so that its pieces, when they are picked up and arranged on a table, still describe a whole glass, but the glass itself lies in shards. To me, sentences should veer and smash up, careen out of control; get under way and find themselves unable to stop, switch directions suddenly and irrevocably, break off, come to a sighing inconclusiveness. If a writer's writings constitute a "body of work," then my body of work, to feel true to me, must feel fragmented.  
(1999:40-41)

CHUCK: Yeah. There was an architecture critic at Yale named Vincent Scully,<sup>9</sup> who once said—I don't know if this is true, but it's what he said—that architects design structures that reflect their own bodies. He was talking about Louis Kahn, and Louis Kahn's muscular, powerful structures of cubes and spheres. Louis Kahn himself was a short, muscular wrestler, and he's also a guy who burned and disfigured his face in early childhood, so he had this scarred face, and all architectural critics said he had trouble with the skin of his buildings, with the outer surface of his buildings. And whether it's true of architecture or not, I don't know, but I think it's true of me. There's stuff that feels, in my body, to be true. So if there's something that feels too intact and well made, I insanely feel that it carries with it this implicit judgment of me that I am not normal, I am not intact. And so my plays try to make a world in which I can feel comfortable and welcome and happy and sane and not judged wanting, and, in some way, normal—that the norm is me, not something else. And so my plays are shattered and fucked up and full of wreckage and stumbling and awkwardness and making some effort not to be civilized. And that feels like me. That feels like it works with me, and if I would get a lot of other people to feel okay about that world too, then I've made the world a safe place for me to live in and I'm no longer threatened.

The motivation to write a play should be life and death. If you're not writing it for those stakes, you're just a dilettante. You don't have to feel that a play is changing the world, that's fine—but if it should happen that it did, for God's sake, you don't want to change the world so that it's hostile to you. So you don't want to write a play that's full of racism or anti-Semitism or misogyny or brutal violence that's accepted, because God forbid it should have some influence on the world, that it should contribute one-millionth of one percent to the creation of a shared sensibility that goes out and shapes the world.

So I think I need to write plays where I can step out into the middle of them and breathe freely and people will be glad to see me and we could live together happily. This doesn't mean that I write all sweet comedies—many of them are nasty, twisted plays. And their structure bears the message of the work. Rausch-

The Greeks and Shakespeare and Brecht  
understood human character  
within a rich context of history and culture.

This is my model.

In 1906/07, Picasso stumbled upon cubism as a possible form.  
Immediately, he made three pencil sketches  
of a man,  
of a newspaper and a couple of other items on a table,



7. Leon Pauli and Akiko Aizawa in *bobraushen-bergamerica*, directed by Anne Bogart at the Actors Theatre of Louisville, spring 2001. (Photo by Richard Trigg)

and of Sacre Coeur—  
that is, of the three classic subjects of art:  
portraiture, still life, and landscape.  
And he proved, to his satisfaction, therefore,  
that cubism “worked.”

My ambition is to do the same for a new form of theatre,  
composed of music and movement as well as text  
like the theatre of the Greeks

enberg makes a work of art in which he takes a piece of garbage on the street and puts it in a gallery—that's the message. And if people love that, and it makes people happy, then Rauschenberg makes a world he won't be snuffed out in.

ERIN: Rauschenberg is, in addition to Ernst, one of the people who has had an enormous influence on you.

CHUCK: Yes, Ernst and Rauschenberg are my models for how to work. Rauschenberg added to what Ernst did. He said: Yes, in fact you can take the ugliest thing in the world—the stuff that other people thought was garbage, the rejected stuff, the despised stuff—and bring it in. And that, too, can be beautiful, or provocative, or evocative, or worth paying attention to. So Rauschenberg contextualizes collage as a great democratic enterprise—this sense of openness, and unthreatened-ness, and egalitarian quality, and wonderful, positive kind of acceptance and taking the despised and the rejected and marginalized of the world and bringing them into this society. So he has served as the other great inspiration for me.

ERIN: When I was in San Francisco casting *First Love* for the Magic Theater, all these women in their 50s and 60s came in to audition. And they had all been playing grandmother roles for 10 years. And I thought: How exciting it must be to get to be in a play where you can do a naked-butt dance and throw 100 dishes and not have to be somebody's well-behaved, chaste grandmother. You've given the women who play Edith a chance to do something they never get to do. And you've given the audience an opportunity to see elderly women [the character is in her mid-70s] in a way they are never portrayed—an opportunity that left many audience members at New York Theatre Workshop in tears, because for the first time they felt represented and understood. There is something transgressive, subversive, in the way you write roles that allow us to see—or insist that we see—other people in a new light.

CHUCK: In some large sense, one of the strategies of my plays is to extend the boundaries of what's considered normal and acceptable for what it is for a human being to be. When I did *Another Person Is a Foreign Country*, we cast a woman who was about two feet tall, and there was a man who was about three feet tall, and his career at that point [in 1991] had included dwarf-tossing contests! I mean, it was unbelievable. The woman sang a song about a love relationship. I remember how grateful she was that the play was not about her being short or disabled. The play was about human life, and she was having one.

ERIN: And that extends to the way you would like to see your plays cast.

CHUCK: There's a certain kind of casting that seems to be a denial of reality. I understand the motivations, and they are motivations with good intentions, but

*I assume readers of TDR are familiar with the work of Anne Bogart, Robert Woodruff, Robert Le Page, Pina Bausch, and Simon McBurney. Sasha Waltz is a German choreographer and director and codirector of the Schaubühne in Berlin, whose productions include Alle de Kosmonauten and Zweiland. Jan Lauwers is a playwright and artist who founded Needcompany in 1985; his productions include The Snakesong Trilogy, and Caligula. Alain Platel is a renowned Belgian choreographer who has choreographed Lets op Bach with his company Les Ballets C. de la B. and directed Bernadetje, which toured Europe. Ivo van Hove directed Alice in Bed, A Streetcar Named Desire, and More Stately Mansions for New York Theatre Workshop; he is director of the Holland Festival in Amsterdam, and General Manager of Het Zuidelijk Toneel, where his production of True Love is part of the repertory.*

—Erin B. Mee

and of American musical comedy  
and of Shakespeare and Brecht  
and of Anne Bogart and Robert Woodruff  
and of Robert Le Page and Simon McBurney  
and of Sasha Waltz and Jan Lauwers and Alain Platel  
and of Pina Bausch and Ivo van Hove  
and of others working in Europe today  
and of theatre traditions in most of the world forever.

ERIN: When we were interviewed by the *New York Times* for *First Love* [Mandell 2001], you went on a tear about naturalistic theatre. I'd like to quote what you said, and give you a chance to continue that rant. Here's what you wrote:

The decline of theatre as an essential art form in America coincides with the triumph of naturalism and the well-made play—which is boring people crazy out of their minds. The great hope for the theatre is that it returns to the immense energies that were in Greek theatre and Shakespeare, theatre that includes not just text and interpersonal relationships but also spectacle, music, dance, physical performance, color, noise, fabulous events happening. The stuff of musical comedy—such a popular form—should always have been the stuff of all theatre.

What happened was that the work of Ibsen—which in its time was wonderful, innovative, avantgarde, rule-breaking theatre—became a standard of reduced, reductionist, drawing room, interpersonal relationships best suited for small television sets, not for large theatrical spaces. People who thrive on that kind of theatre are well served by television and movies. I'm talking about a whole tradition of brilliant, genius, masterful, great playwrights whose time is over.

People who love theatre as it has been for over 5,000 years, with the exception of this small, unusual period in theatrical history, welcome the return of a more highly theatrical form. And that's the tradition out of which, I think, I work, out of which a lot of work is being done in Europe today and out of which a lot of downtown avantgarde work is being done. (2001)

CHUCK: Brustein just wrote a piece in *The New Republic* [2001] in which he agreed with me. And he said that in the 18th century there was a great reaction against the vulgar, as well as against the elite. So that both high-brow and low-brow were eliminated, and the middle-brow bourgeois taste of the middle class came to dominate the theatre. And once you've done that, you can't put both comedy and tragedy into the same piece.

So it's a deep cultural event that created this theatre that we find boring, deathly, suffocating, and stupid. It shuts us down, shuts us up, blinds us, and deafens us with this sort of great muffled roar of reductionist psychology that eliminates history, eliminates politics. It eliminates the things that really all of us know. I think this is why you hardly see young people in the theatre now: young people don't have to be told that this sort of American realist theatre, aesthetically, is old and boring and irrelevant. They know it. They don't need to be told that, for instance, gender affects the way people behave. They're so far past that even being an issue. So I think young people find a lot of theatre irrelevant, or even incomprehensible—it seems like a remote, artificial construct. I think if one cares that theatre be alive in the current moment, then the only hope is to remember the kind of richness and complexity that the Greeks had. I think it's odd that so much theatre since Ibsen is a lot of text that someone stages, rather than a three-dimensional spectacle in which text plays some part along with music and dance and physical performance of all sorts. The rest of the world knows this. The rest of the world never forgot this.

## References

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2001 "Varieties of Theatrical Experience." *The New Republic*, 31 December:25–28.
- Mandell, Jonathan  
2001 "Falling In, Falling Out: Love's Cycle of Rebirth." *The New York Times*, 2 September:AR3, 10.

it seems to me not ideal. I think if you have two white parents, their child should be white onstage. But I also think that there's no reason the parents shouldn't be white and African American, or white and Asian, or Asian and African American—whatever they want to be; disabled, crippled, in wheelchairs, blind, with speech impediments, with faces that are completely disfigured.

I wish my plays would be cast with a total disregard for race and disability, except that once you make a choice, you shouldn't be in the business of denying the implications of the choice you've made. You should be saying that people with any set of physical abilities, any ethnicity, any anything, are capable of having lives that are not completely consumed by the fact of race or disability or whatever else it may be. That they actually can have lives that are centered around love or ambition or idiosyncratic hatreds, or anything else, like the rest of us. So anybody can be cast in anything, and that doesn't mean that once cast, a play has to be rewritten to be about the issue of the father being black or crippled or blind or unable to say "s" without sibilance.

ERIN: I want to end this interview by referring to the end of your bio, which says: "Charles Mee's work is made possible by the support of Richard B. Fisher and Jeanne Donovan Fisher." What has having a patron meant for you and for your work? It is unusual in this day and age to have a patron.<sup>10</sup>

CHUCK: It is unusual. I think it is unique. They are unique. None of my work would exist without them. They have given me the life I wanted all my life—to be able to spend my life writing plays, to write whatever I want, whenever I want, with no demands or requirements or restrictions of any kind, but complete, uncensored freedom—and so the work that I stored up for a lifetime has just poured out these past few years, just poured out in a torrent. And now, the life I wanted for more than forty years, I have—and the good news is, I love it.

## Notes

1. I directed *The Imperialists at the Club Cave Canem* at HOME for Contemporary Theatre and Art (New York) and at the Public Theatre (New York; now the Joseph Papp Public Theatre) in the spring of 1988. I staged it again in the spring of 2001 at the Market Theatre in Cambridge, MA. I directed *First Love* at New York Theatre Workshop in the fall of 2001, and again, with a different cast, at the Magic Theatre in San Francisco in the spring of 2002.
2. For more information on the Wooster Group's use of Arthur Miller's text and his response, see David Savran's book *Breaking the Rules* (1988). In my opinion there is not a good account of the debate surrounding Akalaitis's production of Beckett's *Endgame* at the American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, MA. Until one is written, Jonathan Kalb's account in *Beckett in Performance* (1989) will have to suffice.
3. Lyle and Erik Menendez were found guilty of murder in the first degree for shooting their parents in 1989 after a conflict in their Beverly Hills mansion. The sensational case sparked a debate over the defense tactic of painting the defendants as victims, which became known as "the abuse excuse."
 

Leo Buscaglia is the author of *Living, Loving and Learning* (Random House, 1983), and *Born for Love* (Fawcett Book Group, 1994).

*The Pillow Book* (Penguin Books, [1967] 1971) is the journal of Sei Shonagon, a Japanese lady-in-waiting to Empress Sadaka. Sei Shonagon describes life in a 10th-century Japanese court, as well as her personal thoughts.

*Male Fantasies* is a book by Klaus Thewelt (University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

*W* was formerly *Women's Wear Daily*.

Elaine Scarry is the author of *The Body in Pain* (Oxford University Press, 1987).
4. Max Ernst worked with Hans Arp to create collages they called "Fatagaga," which is abbreviation for "fabrication de tableaux garantis gazométriques" (manufacture of pictures guaranteed to be gasometric); an example is *Physiomythologisches dikuvialbild* (1920), realized using the photomontage technique. During this period [1918–1922]

## Chronology

Erin B. Mee

Chuck Mee: I graduated from college in 1960 wanting to write plays. And my plays were done at the old La MaMa, before its present location, and at Café Cino, and at Theatre Genesis. And we did a play upstairs at the Ontological at St. Mark's that was mocked by Jerry Talmer in the *New York Post*. Not panned, but mocked. And that was devastating to me. Twenty years later he wrote a piece about me, about a book I had written, and I went to meet him at the *Post* and he reached into his pocket and pulled out an old clipping, and he said "You probably don't remember this," and I said "I remember every word of it. It's one of the reasons I stopped writing plays for 25 years."

So I had a general sense that I wasn't succeeding in writing for the theatre. And at the same time I had gotten increasingly caught up in anti-Vietnam war activities, which led to political art, which led to political writing, which led to historical writing, and in a way I got caught up in a political argument that I couldn't extricate myself from. And I spent 20 years writing political history books that were essentially about the behavior of America in the world and how that came home to damage life and politics in America. And I had a family to support. And I didn't know how to step off that life. I didn't understand how to honor the obligations I had to support my family, while making a career in the theatre.

I came back to writing theatre in 1982 or '83. I had been trying to write a novel, and I had been living off credit cards and I had no money. Finally I received a pink piece of paper saying that the sheriff's office was going to auction off all my furniture for the nonpayment of back taxes. And I framed that piece of paper because I thought: "This is the low point." So I had gotten behind, and I looked at the novel and realized it was absolute junk. It was dead. So I took the pieces of paper out to a trash can, and I threw them away. And then I thought: that was stupid, because there were things in there that I wanted to remember for myself, for my own writing. So I decided to make some notes on some of this stuff, and the notes took the form of a trilogy of one-act plays, which I wrote in 10 days. And I looked at them and thought, Oh, I get it: if you're just writing for yourself, for your own sake, to understand your own life, to have it be clear, to know what you think and feel and to be able to remember it clearly, this is the form it takes. So that's when I went back to writing plays.

But I understood, once I had gotten back into writing for the theatre, that my only job was to write for myself and not for anyone else, and that I had to write what I felt was true and what felt good to me, and just have the confidence that it might feel good to somebody else.

- 1938 Born in Evanston, IL
- 1960 Graduated from Harvard College with a BA in English Literature
- 1960 Took a job on Wall Street that lasted for a year
- 1961 Started work at American Heritage publishing company, eventually became the editor of *Horizon* magazine
- 1962 *Constantinople Smith, Anyone! Anyone!* and *Player's Repertoire*, directed by Stephen Aaron, produced at the Writers' Stage Company
- 1963 *The Gate* produced by Theatre Genesis at St. Mark's in the Bowery  
Advising Editor and then Contributing Editor of *TDR* until 1964; Associate Editor of *TDR* from 1964 to 1965
- 1964 *Player's Repertoire* produced at La MaMa E.T.C.  
*God Bless Us, Every One* published in *TDR* 10, 1 (T29):162-206
- 1965 Turned from writing plays to writing books
- 1969 *Lorenzo De'Medici and the Renaissance*, the first of 14 nonfiction books published, Harpercollins Juvenile Books
- 1970 *Daily Life in the Renaissance* published by American Heritage
- 1971 *Erasmus* published by G.P. Putnam
- 1972 *White Robe, Black Robe* published by G.P. Putnam
- 1975 *Meeting at Potsdam*, a main selection of the Literary Guild, published, M. Evans & Co. Adapted for film and television by David Susskind. Subsequently published in England, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Turkey, the Netherlands, Israel, Argentina, Holland, Poland, Yugoslavia
- 1976 *A Visit to Haldeman and Other States of Mind* published by M. Evans and Co.

- 1977 *Seizure* published by M. Evans and Co., a selection of the Literary Guild. Published by Dell in paperback, in Readers' Digest Condensed Books, excerpted in magazines, adapted into a film for network television and broadcast in 1983. Subsequently published in Japan and Israel
- 1980 *The Ohio Gang* published by M. Evans and Co., a selection of the Book of the Month Club  
*The End of Order* published by Dutton, a selection of the History Book Club.
- 1984 *The Marshall Plan* published by Simon and Schuster, a selection of the History Book Club. Published by Touchstone in paperback. Subsequently published in Germany and England.  
*The Investigation of the Murder in El Salvador*—the first play since 1965—published in *Wordplays*, PAJ Publications
- 1986 *Vienna: Lusthaus*, directed by Martha Clarke, performed at the Public Theatre (now the Joseph Papp Public Theatre) in New York, the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, and in Venice, Vienna, and Paris  
 Obie award for Best Play (*Vienna: Lusthaus*)
- 1987 *Vienna: Lusthaus* published in *TDR* 31, 3:42–58
- 1988 *Genius of the People*, a selection of Book of the Month Club, published, HarperCollins  
*The Imperialists at the Club Cave Canem*, directed by Erin B. Mee, produced at HOME for Contemporary Theatre of Art and the Public Theatre in New York  
*The Constitutional Convention* published in *PAJ* XI, 1:77–88
- 1989 *The Investigation of the Murder in El Salvador*, directed by David Schweizer, produced at New York Theatre Workshop
- 1990 *Rembrandt's Portrait: A Biography*, a selection of Book of the Month Club, published, Simon & Schuster
- 1991 *Another Person Is a Foreign Country*, a site-specific theatre piece, directed by Anne Bogart, produced by En Garde Arts
- 1992 *Orestes* directed by Robert Woodruff at UCSD, Anne Bogart at the Saratoga International Theatre Institute, and by Tina Landau with En Garde Arts in New York. Subsequently produced in LA, San Diego, Seattle, Chicago, and elsewhere
- 1993 *The War to End War*, directed by Matt Wilder, produced at the Sledgehammer Theatre in San Diego  
*Orestes* published in *PAJ* XV, 3:29–79
- 1994 *The War to End War* published in *Theatreforum* 5, Sum/Fall:45–59  
*Agamemnon* directed by Brian Kulick, produced by the Actors' Gang in L.A.  
*My House Was Collapsing toward One Side*, directed by the author, produced at Dance Theatre Workshop in New York by Erin B. Mee
- 1997 *Time to Burn*, directed by Tina Landau, produced at Steppenwolf in Chicago
- 1998 *History Plays* published, Johns Hopkins University Press  
*The Berlin Circle*, directed by Tina Landau, produced at Steppenwolf in Chicago
- 1999 *The Berlin Circle* published in *Theatreforum* 14:27–57
- 2000 *Full Circle* (a retitled *Berlin Circle*), directed by Robert Woodruff, produced at the American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, MA  
*Big Love*, directed by Les Waters, produced at the Actors' Theatre of Louisville in the Humana Festival. Later toured to the Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Long Wharf in New Haven, the Goodman Theatre in Chicago, ACT in Seattle, the Woolly Mammoth in DC, and was part of the Next Wave Festival at the Brooklyn Academy of Music  
*Summertime*, directed by Kenn Watt, produced at the Magic Theatre in San Francisco
- 2001 *The Imperialists at the Club Cave Canem*, directed by Erin B. Mee, produced at The Market Theatre in Cambridge, MA, as their inaugural production  
*bobrauschenbergamerica*, directed by Anne Bogart, produced at the Actors' Theatre of Louisville in the Humana Festival  
*bobrauschenbergamerica* published in *American Theatre* XVIII, 7:57–75  
*Big Love* translated into Malayalam and produced at the School of Drama in Thrissur, Kerala, India  
*True Love* translated into Dutch, directed by Ivo van Hove, and presented at the Holland Festival, after which it joined the repertory of the National Theatre of the Netherlands  
*First Love*, directed by Erin B. Mee, produced at New York Theatre Workshop  
*True Love*, directed by Daniel Fish, produced at the Zipper Theatre in New York  
*Big Love* published in *Theatreforum* 18:20–41  
 Recipient of: Steinberg Citation; Laura Pels/Pen America Award; 2001 Award for Distinction in Literature, American Academy of Arts and Letters; San Francisco Bay Area Critics Circle best play award for *Summertime*

Ernst, also very influenced by Giorgio de Chirico, produced several of his best works by combining different techniques of collage. In *1 Kupferblech 1 Zinkblech 1 Gummibuch 2 Tastzirkel...* (c. 1920), the artist pieces together fantastic figures using pictures of various objects (goggles, a retort, pipes...) he had cut out of printed matter, then completed his composition with traditional watercolor and drawing. [...] In Max Ernst's works, the title cannot be dissociated from the image (it is, moreover, as in Paul Klee and Kurt Schwitters, usually inscribed on the work itself). It confers a mysterious, poetic meaning on the composition, which is always, if not figurative, at least allusive. (2002)

5. Hockey father Thomas Junta was found guilty of involuntary manslaughter for beating fellow sports dad Michael Costin to death on 5 July 2000. The case spawned debates about excessive competitiveness in children's sports.
6. *First Love* began rehearsal on 2 July 2001, and opened on 9 September 2001.
7. This comment about random emotion is something Chaikin said during the course of a workshop he organized in the basement of La MaMa E.T.C. My father does not remember when the workshop occurred.
8. The ART Institute operates under the auspices of the American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, MA. Robert Woodruff officially replaces Robert Brustein as Artistic Director in August 2002.
9. Vincent Scully, Sterling Professor Emeritus of the History of Art at Yale, is the author of *Louis I. Kahn: In the Realm of Architecture* (Rizzoli, 1991), *Architecture: The Natural and the Man-made* (St. Martin's Press, 1993), and *Earth, the Temple, and the Gods: Greek Sacred Architecture* (Yale University Press, 1988).
10. Richard B. Fisher and Jeanne Donovan Fisher give my father a yearly stipend to write plays. He has offered to give them the royalties from productions, which, so far, they have refused to take.

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**Erin B. Mee** has directed *First Love* at *New York Theatre Workshop* and *the Magic Theatre*; *The Imperialists* at the *Club Cage Canem* at *the Public Theatre* and *the Market Theatre*; *Troilus and Cressida* and several other productions at *the Guthrie Theater* (where she was a *Resident Director*); a workshop of *The Oldest Profession* at *Mabou Mines* (where she was a *Resident Artist*); and two plays by *Kavalam Narayana Panikkar* with the prestigious *Sopanam Theatre Company* in *Kerala, South India*. She is the editor of *Drama Contemporary: India* (*Johns Hopkins University Press* 2001), and her articles have appeared in *Performing Arts Journal*, *American Theatre Magazine*, and *Seagull Theatre Quarterly* (*Calcutta*). She teaches at *Bard College*.