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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

Directing *The Rogue's Trial* - *"It is enough, although it may be little."*

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Master of Fine Arts

In

Theatre and Dance (Directing)

by

Ludmila Cardoso de Brito

Committee in charge:

Professor Vanessa Stalling, Chair Professor
Professor Stephen Buescher
Professor José Fuste
Professor Lamar Perry

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University of California San Diego

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Directing *The Rogue's Trial*. - "It is enough, although it may be little."

by

Ludmila Cardoso de Brito

Master of Fine Arts in Theatre and Dance

University of California San Diego 2025

Professor Vanessa Stalling, Chair

This thesis is a reflective piece delving into my process for editing and directing *The Rogue's Trial* by Ariano Suassuna. My work with this classic Brazilian play serves as a case study as I reflect on my journey as a director invested in the transformative power of our stories.

I am a storyteller, and I am Brazilian. I grew up nurtured by my grandma's tales about her indigenous father. I also grew up getting blessed by old ladies with herbs, *benzedadeiras* (*healers*), and eating pirão while also removed from any physical connection to my grandma's ancestral homelands. All I

have are the oral stories, the taste of her food, and a stubborn belief that no matter how many times they cut the tree, remove the tree, the land has memory, and the roots find their way back into the soil.

As I have come to understand, our stories are not just narratives but acts of resistance, survival, and permanence. The irony of the ephemeral being what makes it all continuous is a concept that never ceases to fascinate me. Oral stories have kept ancestral knowledge alive for millennia; this tradition I've inherited, and it is my job to work on the craft. In my thesis production, I set out to merge the tools and techniques I have honed as a director with the ancestral technologies that compose my identity.

The Rogue's Trial, an Epic story originally written in Portuguese - *O Auto da Compadecida*, features a playwright who calls himself a clown, critiques the institution of the church, includes a scene of mass murder, and calls out the hypocrisy of those afraid to acknowledge that racism is alive and well. Its unconventional comedia del arte style and folkloric structure boldly juxtapose the grotesque and the sublime, forcing us to confront our reality and embrace the complexity and contradictions of being human. Hypocrisy, religious corruption, and violence were relevant to 1950s Brazil and, sadly, remain strikingly pertinent in 2025 America. The title '*The Rogue's Trial*' refers to the protagonist's journey of self-discovery and societal critique, a profoundly flawed protagonist set on a journey that is both a trial and a testament to the resilience of the human spirit. Ah, and it is a comedy!

To me, a play will never feel finished - it is a living thing, like a fire - I will always find more places where the story can get stronger and sharper. Yet, whether I like it or not, there is a moment in the process when the play takes on a life of its own - and that is the beauty of it: it ignites and burns on, like gathering around a fire. Kim Senklip Harvey said it best; she names directors as Fire Igniters and Tenders¹. And that speaks to me deeply - we find the spark and gather the sticks to fire it up so that the fire can warm those who choose to join the circle.

I often find myself thinking about the line from the clown;

"I trust that all of you here will profit from the moral lessons of this play and reform your lives. But I'm sure you are already veritable saints, exemplary in virtue and in your love for God and for your neighbor, without wickedness,

¹ Harvey, K. S. (2023). *Kamloopa: An indigenous matriarch story*.

*without meanness, incapable of passing judgment on others or speaking ill of them, generous, without avarice, ideal employers, model employees, sober, chaste, and long-suffering. It is enough, although it may be little. Music”
Circus music. Exit clown, dancing.²*

This line holds the impossibility of an idealized way of living and the beauty of our striving towards it; to seek the impossible is enough, although it may be little and we might never do it. I will always hold my hunger for directing with the hope of a clown, reaching towards all a story can possibly be, with the love and craft it deserves, knowing there is always more work I can do. As a director, I dedicate my life to getting people to care. To have hope is to resist. To tell stories and to insist on community is to resist. Sure, theatre might not immediately feed those who are hungry. But pretending misery doesn't exist is part of the problem, so there is something powerful about talking about these things within the community you are in, and as Augusto Boal³ believed, we can maybe ask the right questions to the right people who might actually be able to do something about it. Ultimately, my thesis is a personal and artistic exploration of the role of a director as a storyteller and a catalyst for meaningful dialogue within the community.

² Suassuna, A., & Ratcliff, D. F. (1963). *The rogues' trial*. University of California Press.

³ Boal, Augusto. *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Theatre Communications Group, 2013.

Directing *The Rogue's Trial*. - "It is enough, although it may be little."

What follows is a reflection on some of the main challenges and takeaways of my Journey directing *The Rogue's Trial* at The Weiss Forum Theatre at the University of California, San Diego. This reflection focuses on methods such as the balance between humor and horror, and the intentional use of theatrical violence as a narrative tool: avoiding glorification while addressing real societal issues. It reflects on the importance of clear theatrical language to cultivate audience trust, enabling bolder artistic choices. I have also selected takeaways I want to remember for the next time I work with this text and the tools I have learned and will carry with me as I continue my journey.



Figure 1 - Ludy, directing

The Why Here, Why Now, or *The Gift of The Play*: As a director, a big part of the job is to help folks in the room understand why this project is important and worth everyone's time and energy. So, to be clear on the urgent need for this story is essential.

Every play has a gift to offer the world. In *The Rogue's Trial*, the gift lives in Mercy itself. Our human capacity to meet each other where we are at, and thus love each other and help our community grow.

The following was my director's note:

The Rogues' Trial is a powerful exploration of mischief and survival set against the backdrop of the unforgiving Brazilian drylands. It is a rich blend of comedy, music, and Brazilian folktales!

At the heart of this play is clever resilience, which has allowed oppressed communities to navigate and transcend societal injustices through resourcefulness and creativity. This can be seen in the syncretic resistance to colonialism of Indigenous and Afro-Brazilian communities who ingeniously transformed imposed catholicism into unique expressions of faith, reflected in the practices of folk healers as well as spiritual traditions that are inclusive and hold the ancestral integrity of those who understood that clever mischief meant survival.

This play is a celebration of popular culture: in resistance to imperialism, the erasure of traditional expression, and beyond the call for resistance, the play celebrates the transformative power of storytelling, music, humor, and dance as vital tools for confronting injustice.

Our reality in 2025 is violent and absurd—and here comes this Brazilian classic, where a clown reflects the spirit of defiant joy amidst suffering. This play underscores the urgent need for mischief within mercy as our biggest weapon to challenge broken systems of justice and sustain the hope to keep fighting through community. All infused by the rhythm of the tambourine: *na maior malandragem!*

"It is enough, although it may be little... Music!"

Circus music. Exit clown

This text was new to everyone but me - which made its success directly connected to my ability to lift its importance and impact on our community. It was not just a play about Brazilians, but it was a play about the human ability to resist violence. It uses the dark clown to provoke dialogue and call out racism, police brutality, and cruelty - while offering hope and mercy as the antidote to giving up or caving in. A play written 70 years ago highlighting the hypocrisy of our current politicians is the pure juice of the power of theatre.

To convey the why and the how, I wrote a letter to my collaborators, inspired by Barry Edelstein, the Artistic Director of San Diego's The Old Globe. This letter served as a barometer I could always return to to assess whether we were moving toward our objective. The act of writing the letter forced me to have clarity on what I needed and how I hoped to achieve it. I caught myself saying the sentence, "If we do our jobs right, in this moment, this is what the audience will experience" and just like actors pursuing objectives, I witnessed my team getting excited about solving the problem because I had taken the time to be specific about what we were all fighting for and moving towards.

Of course, the work evolved, but the access to a clear written vision helped my team understand that their director had taken the time to think through the whys and the hows and was willing to discover and grow together.

Having the letter was a grounding force that allowed us to leap at moving sooner than we were ready, which was particularly helpful for this process, as I am a kinesthetic learner and have adapted Table Work to encourage my actors to live in their bodies instead of just reading from the paper.

Reminder to self: The more language and research I have to support what I feel in my heart, the more powerful the work will be. There is never, ever too much. In fact, it is a gift to your collaborators.

When a play hooks you, images will come to you, and for this process, I had a few;

John Cricket walking towards hell: the visceral feeling of being on the verge of giving up hope, being pulled towards apathy.



Figure 2 - Scene 17, John Cricket starts walking towards hell.

Chicó's Magic Stories - telling stories to save our lives or to keep us alive moves me more than I have words to describe it. I imagined a world that would transform and an ensemble that would come together to tell the story with handmade magic props, and just like they appeared, they would vanish from our sight.



Figure 3: Chicó Blessed Horse Story

In the spirit of lifting religious syncretism, I wanted to challenge the Eurocentric vision of religion. Another element of syncretism I wanted to uplift was the intentionality of Afro and Indigenous Diasporic symbolism in the play - and we built on that by syncretizing our Jesus with the Yoruban God Oxalá, our Clown with Exu.

The script asks for a tableau with the Virgin Mary and Satan right before he scurries back to hell. Instead of replicating the traditional Catholic image of the virgin stepping on the serpent, I was inspired by the statue of the Cabocla Jupira, where instead of stepping on the Serpent, this holy mother holds the red animal on her lap with mercy. This study guided us toward this final image:



Figure 4: Tableau with the Virgin Mary and Satan

In a world where everyone deserves a second chance, could mercy extend to the source of harm itself? That question intrigued me throughout the process. John Cricket asks, *"What is the matter with him?"* Mary responds, *" He turned towards you and saw me."*

My Costume Designer incorporated the snake into the costume for Satan; my Lighting Designer built her plot to sculpt beautifully this tender moment - the Scenic designer lifted Jesus in juxtaposition to the moment of justice above and mercy doing the actual work of tending to those who need the most - and my sound designer knew to suck sound out of the space for that moment in which time was suspended.

Reminder to self: trust these images and let your designers enter the dream early. What I saw in my mind was nowhere near as stunning or powerful as what my team created together.

When doing culturally specific work, it is essential to lose myself in the world and follow the threads in front of me. Brazilian art goes beyond elevator music or big butts and ladies dancing, which, don't get me wrong, has its own value, and there is plenty of research to back that up, but the thought of an audience member leaving the theatre with their stereotypes reinforced horrified me. The the answer to address that fear was specificity and research. To honor the playwright's dream of celebrating our rich cultural heritage, I traveled to the Brazilian Northeast this summer to conduct a significant portion of my thesis production research: to dive into the cultural and historical context of the play by directly engaging with the people and environment that inspired it, as well as my very own elders who have witnessed the rise of the Cangaço era through the droughts in the hinterlands. As a theatre director with Indigenous roots, I envisioned producing this play as a culmination of my identity and passion for storytelling. By weaving together the traditional elements of my heritage within a beloved Brazilian play, I hoped to create a cohesive and culturally rich theatrical experience celebrating our native roots, which Brazilian mainstream culture often marginalizes.

It is however naive to lift the beauty of our diversity without acknowledging the violence behind that richness. Brazilian history is marked by colonization, forced religious conversions, slavery, and cultural oppression. When the Portuguese arrived in 1500, their colonizing mission vilified native ancestral practices. Similarly, when the Portuguese brought African enslaved peoples to the land, Catholic priests

demonized their spiritual traditions. Indigenous and African descendants had to incorporate Christian beliefs into their practices to preserve their heritage. For instance, The Virgin Mary became a representation of the Yoruban goddess Yemanjá in the form of Nossa Senhora Aparecida. Capoeira is an Afro-indigenous fight technique disguised as a dance. Afro-Indigeneity in Brazil is a story of resilience and survival that requires proper recognition and appreciation, which I can't separate from our popular culture.

In the Northeast, I visited Indigenous territories close to or ancestrally connected to my family: Fulni-ô, Kariri-Xocó, Xucuru, Pancararu, and Xucuru-Kariri.

There, I interviewed leaders about their relationship to syncretized Catholicism and shared my idea of highlighting Indigenous protagonism in our making as peoples, which is often erased from the media whenever Brazil is portrayed internationally.

In my interviews, I witnessed the juxtaposition between the erasure in the media and the erasure in history: families who were denied the right to name their children with names that were not in Portuguese, parents separating their children from their mother tongue to protect them from being killed by landowners. I also witnessed patterns of Quilombos and Indigenous territories in mutual protection against a system of justice that was deeply flawed and violent. The reality is that this violence has not ended, which reinforces the need for syncretism as survival.



Figure 5 - Final Version of Mary's Donation Box

In this production I wanted to combat erasure by lifting the Indigenous protagonist through the role of Mary, our Lady Mercy.



Figure 6 - Image of the Virgin Mary at Kariri Xocó Territory, Propriá, Brazil

In this concept, Mary, as the mother of God, represents our Mother Earth, our Pachamama, and that translated in my work with my costume designer as well as the actress who played the role of Mary, Mercedes - whose name happens to mean Mercy.

I also dove into the playwright's body of work. *Romance D'A Pedra Do Reino e O Príncipe do Sangue do Vai-e-Volta* was particularly helpful for me in understanding the role of the clown. There is a line in it where he says that he is a clown of the divine, put into this world to suffer, but amidst all of the suffering of human existence in a land that is harsh: in his eyes, you will see tears, but in his lips, he smiles. That endurance, that almost maniacal hunger for telling stories, lived at the heart of what I wanted this production to be.

I landed in a much more complex and magical world than I could ever have imagined, that couldn't be farther away from elevator music and stereotyped dancers. The more I researched, the more interviews I found with the playwright, lifting the importance of recognizing Indigenous Theatre and the deep roots in African Music and Spirituality in our culture - a call connected to this play that was screaming at me in every corner I looked. So, when I looked back at the actions of the play full of mischief and syncretism, I could back up the themes through the characters' actions.

Reminder to self: when art talks to you in a certain way, listen to it and then research to back it up. The key is a commitment to creating a theatrical experience that is rich, meaningful, and authentic to the voices and narratives that it aims to serve.

On Gathering Your Community: I anticipated a challenge in daring to adapt a Brazilian classic for a majority American audience and with an American cast: whether the humor, style, and social commentary would translate.

To address that, I did a couple of read-throughs and tracked the moments in which people without context laughed, screamed, and awed. I then worked with my dramaturgy team to try to preserve the boldness of the writing while making it accessible to the audience. One example is when John Cricket calls Satan the son of an incubator. Brazilians know what a “filho de chocadeira” means, but the joke did not land until we changed it to the “son of a—...”—you know what I mean here, right?

It was also important to me for the play to be composed with the melancholy melody typical of popular Brazilian styles, so I collaborated with Wesley Guimarães, a Brazilian actor and musician, to compose the songs already written in the play.



Figure 7 : Music rehearsal with Wesley Guimarães

For our curtain call, Luana Fontes, Brazilian and Paraiban, choreographed the coco dance, with the support of Hanna Schuler. Paulo Batuta and Halysson Silva taught our actors how to play the percussion for the dance, as well as the lyrics for the call and response work song we used in our closing gesture.



Figure 8: Learning the call and response Coco song with Mestre Paulo Batuta

Cole Thomason, our Music Director, mentored our Mighty Band of 3, where 2 of our actors fully learned how to play the Accordion and the Rabeca for this show, with the assistance of music coaches. There is so much that I don't know, and what I learned is that there is no limit to the wealth of knowledge and brilliance that can be found within our community. The mistake is to pretend we already know it all or to be afraid of dreaming of what could be.

This tradition of bringing aunties and uncles into the creative space stems from what I learned from Siobhan Brown. Siobhan, or Growing Elm, is a citizen of the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe. She is also an artist, educator, and professional Theatre Auntie who taught me the importance of not working in a vacuum and bringing in my elders to challenge the separation of hierarchy in creative spaces. This practice made me feel less alone, created a venue for intergenerational teaching and kept me accountable to my community.



Figure 9: First Coco Workshop with Luana Fontes

Reminder to self: Understanding one's intersectionality and bringing to the table the people who will keep you honest is essential to moving from a place of truth, joy, and rigor.

Time is Bendable If Used Wisely. With five weeks of rehearsals and a text reading at around 3 hours, it was essential to optimize our time. So I broke down the team into groups and gave them scenes to focus on, to build tableaux or little scenes in conversation the text, and I was floored to witness what they built. There is something magic that happens when we have just less than enough time to create something evocative. I reflect on the love that my team found between Severino and the Bandit: even with the few lines, the depth of their relationship exists thanks to the work the actors did in that separate room.



Figure 10: Antonio Noronha de Brito Moraes coming to Taperoá.

I was brought to tears when my actors playing Satan and Mary discovered the powerful yet simple intimacy of a reach toward someone's face. And tears of laughter when my clown, priest, bishop, and friar, were able to find brilliant physical comedy surrounding bribery that I could never have come up with on my own. Trust your collaborators.

Also, as much as you can, have stand-in props early in the rehearsal room and take the time to practice transitions, even if you need to have folks miming the lifting up of an imaginary church. I never had a smoother tech process, which is partially due to my highly capable stage management team, and also the labor we did in the rehearsal room to prepare our actors, physically and mentally, to move their own set at all times. Much can be accomplished with the power of playing pretend, especially when folks know you are doing so to set them up for success - don't ever forget that.

Reminder to self: the more empowered the team is, the more they understand what we are building toward. With enough pressure to create something without the time to overthink, the sky is the limit.



Figure 11- John Cricket and Chicó mourning for the dead dog

On Exu Preparing You For What's To Come; Stuff happens; it is live theatre, and inevitably, during the process, we will find ourselves in situations that will force us to pivot. There is a muscle that I feel has always served me as a director - the one to stay in problem-solving mode when things get hard. That, and my ADHD, which makes me surprisingly calm when everything is on fire: The more problems arise everywhere, the more clearly my brain sees the more efficient solutions. Exu, the god of crossroads, has guided me in this process by placing many obstacles and training me to work hard to solve the problems and keep the team on track and feeling confident. The obstacles in the way prepared us for each next challenge we faced, from a fake fire alarm to one of our leads having to miss opening weekend. But due to our strengthened pivoting muscle, our understudies were ready and hungry, and I could not have imagined a better opening night. This fresh energy made the show grow at every performance, and this hunger for the team was fuel for the production.

Reminder to self: when things get hard, there is a valuable lesson ahead, so lean in. There is a gift to gain from every person who enters the space or offers a note, we are growing together. The show will be the best version it can possibly be, as long as you keep fighting for it.

In the Spirit of Mutual Exchange, Theatre is A Ritual: we come together around a fire (story), and experience it together. Each person receives from the story what they need at that moment in their lives. The same is true for the rehearsal process, which is why we developed little rituals such as breathing together to close out rehearsals.

The production begins with the clown asking for permission from the land to tell a story, as I did when I entered and left the rehearsal room. A story that was to be told in stolen land, by the Mexican border, about the life of a migrant. The play ends with Coco, a working popular dance that firms the soil in which we are collectively building a home, even if displaced, despite all of the violence, the ritual of gathering allows us to keep dreaming. It highlights resilience within art and the preservation of ritual through dance and music.

This practice of a curated experience extended to the moment in which folks walked into the theatre, everything had intentionality - at the door, an altar, celebrating some of the prominent figures of syncretized popular spirituality in Brazil. The dramaturgy team also made a cordel, which contained some of the core historical elements mentioned in the play. The Cordel is a form of passing on stories through verse, popular folklore - think Shakespeare sonnets, but Brazilian - from which Ariano Suassuna shamelessly stole some of the plot points in *The Rogue's Trial*. My favorite was Michelle Obama's prayer candle.



Figure 12: Our Altar

Reminder to self: you are crafting a communal, intentional experience; make room for your ancestors by allowing yourself to play and by inviting the audience and your collaborators to hold the story with you.

For When it Gets Hard, Trust Your Gut, Especially When It is Scary: The moment when John Cricket starts walking towards hell, and Mercy comes to stop him from doing so is the play's climax. I went through many iterations of blocking as to when or if I should bring Mary down to the deck, and I am glad I did not give up. I am grateful I had the trust of my team to be willing to pivot and make the moment Mary steps onstage and the second chance for John Cricket to be as impactful as I needed it to be.

John Cricket and Chicó are this story's heart and lungs. The more specific I was with what I was looking for, the more fun everyone will have. A good example of that is the last Chicó song, which is about their friendship and their love. We worked on different versions of it until we found that it is really about each other and not a ripple of a magical moment to the audience because, at this moment, the audience loves what they have. We don't need to put a hat on a hat. Once we learned that, everything got unlocked, and the joy in the writing for this moment revealed itself beautifully to us.

Another moment of gut trusting was when we removed the signaling clicking sound so the actors could be on beat with the coco dance. It all stemmed from insecurity and fear: at its heart, the coco is a call-and-response tradition, not a musical theatre moment that needs a conductor on a screen. It stems from building something with each other; *Coco* is a *brincadeira*, which poorly translates to “to play,”



Figure 13: Final staging of *Coco*

We did the scary thing, which was to trust the actors to know the beat, and I am so thrilled we did. The beat made them doubt themselves when all they needed was trust and a little scary nudge.

Reminder to Self: Each actor has a different processing language, and it is my job to meet them where they are so that we can tell the story. I also need them to know I trust them to tell the story so that they can trust themselves.

Instinct; let go of it when it is not working, but fight with all you got for those you know work: I

caught myself resisting cutting the play, and this process forced me to find very good reasons for why something had to stay. The conundrum appeared since I am deeply in love with this story and Ariano's writing, but I had to be realistic about my audience's attention span and the payoff of the nuance on every page.

For example, the play begins and ends with one of the main characters telling a story, which doesn't seem essential at first glance for the bigger plot. However, when I follow Chicó's journey, I see his ability to tell stories and his seemingly cowardly attitude keeping him alive when everyone around him dies. This need to tell tall tales gives us the strength to keep going against a reality that brings us down. I culturally knew this was important to the story. Still, I could only justify and earn them by intentionally blocking and sharpening the build-up and coming out of those stories so that the audience didn't lose track of the main plot. With design, I also made a sharp shift so the audience could delight in the magic that appeared before them. My marker of success for those is that by the third time that Chicó named something outrageous, such as getting caught by a fish once, the audience audibly responded with joyful "*Oh, here he goes again,*" and this helped us earn the applause that came from the audience after the last line of the play: "*I don't know, all I know is, that's the way it was.*" The hitch is that tech was crucial for those magic stories to work, and I held on to them until I could see them in context and either prove myself right or wrong.



Figure 14: Of when Chicó got caught by a Pirarucu fish

The same thing happened with the moment in which John Cricket needs to pull a coin out of a cat's behind onstage. I knew that we needed that grotesqueness, which, if done realistically, could easily read as animal abuse and completely turn off my audience. Our solution lived in stylizing the theatricality but leaning in. My barometer was in designer runs: I was watching whether my audience looked entirely away in disgust or just looked confused and put off. Once I saw the collective moving away and shocked laughter, I knew we had achieved the emotional engagement needed to earn the earnestness of John Cricket's upcoming death.

However, similarly to those moments worth fighting for, you know in your gut when a moment doesn't work. When you once dreamed it would work, but reality proved you wrong. Cricket's Death was the perfect case study: we played with a million iterations of this scene, where we experience reality getting to our rascal trickster, who ultimately can't trick his way out of all the violence of this world.

We played with the idea of a blood pump the actor would trigger and several different iterations of the fall. I understood that what the play needed at that moment was the simplicity of the actor turning, facing the bandit, and getting shot because the helplessness we experience is what John was going through. I understood that the audience was following John Cricket's journey. So, I needed to replicate John's experience for the audience instead of making it a bigger spectacle than it needed to be. This realization, made before we were too deep into tech, saved us a lot of time and energy. It allowed us to invest in making the experience more visceral to the audience through sculpting lights and sound.



Figure 15: John Cricket's Death

Reminder to self: Establish markers for auditioning the idea and to allow enough time to pivot. Listen to your audience, fight fiercely for what you know works, and trust your instinct when it doesn't. Then fix it.

Momentum and Style: There are many jokes in the play, which, to me, speak to a need to experience joy collectively and dream. But I caught myself watching runs and seeing the audience get ahead of the jokes. So I had to reflect on whether the repetitions were serving the story, and make further cuts without

jeopardizing the writing or the audience's ability to follow the plot. That was only possible by taking a step out and looking at the flow of the whole show. Actors will hate when their lines are cut, but will thank you once they see how the cuts freshens the story. Once everyone knew what we were building towards, the actors then knew to not let the energy die, from Cricket's first bad idea all the way to the the moment where everyone was getting killed by the end of the act.

This world demands the audience to truly not know where we are going with the story, and for a play like that to work, we needed to resist the urge to relish for too long in the jokes. The clowns need to lose themselves in the problems instead of commenting on the jokes. The pace needs to be tight; which means we need to move on from the jokes before we are fully ready. To quote Melia Bensussen; *"there is a bigger prize at the end"*: To earn the heartbreak and redemption, there needs be a cost for these characters to tell this story.

This style also asks for a clown narrator who is almost cruel, who chooses to love its characters and their lives despite all of the suffering they are bound to encounter. The events in the show keeps building up non-stop because life builds up nonstop. This process, and my simultaneous training in Clowning classes helped me with the language of progression for comedy, just like lists naturally build up, each event is more outrageous than the last. Knowing where I end informs me of where we should begin, so it is crucial that I, as the director, am learning the style myself, so I can truly support my actors.

Reminder to self: Keep track of the whole journey, even if it means cutting jokes and resisting the audience's delight if it interrupts the flow. The horror needs to be honest for the delight to exist. The cut must support momentum and keep the play fresh, which is essential to crafting the journey I need the audience to experience. Also, get the training you need to be good at what you want to do.



Figure 16: Satan

Speaking of everyone getting killed, something that I want to remember is what I learned about the theatrical violence in this play. As someone who has always been overly cautious, I knew I could not afford to shy away from violence in this play, especially while telling the story of folks who are victims of many layers of violence, from the weather to the government, from police brutality to plain toxic masculinity. Here are some questions that I was grappling with: How to do that without glorifying death and also not reinforcing harmful stereotypes against Latin American countries? And how to stage someone coming and shooting everyone in a country plagued by school shootings like the United States? My approach to that was to follow what the play wanted to do, which, in this case, was to warn the audience of the danger looming ahead slowly, and I used that structure to tell that story visually.



Figure 17: The killing of the chicken at pre-show

Notice the seeds: At the pre-show, we see a chicken getting killed. The set had a cow skull on the ground, indicating that death lives here. The clown then accidentally kills its band with a finger gun - oh, but don't worry, it was just a finger gun. Then, the dog bladder removed from its body, John Cricket sings a song about Lampião and Maria Bonita's murder; he then curses everyone onstage and threatens to shoot Chicó with a finger gun; they start wrestling but are interrupted by theatrical gunshots offstage. The executions happen offstage, building into a maniacal laughter from Severino.



Figure 18: Severino and the Bandit come to Taperoá

Severino then gets himself executed onstage by his partner with the gunshot effect coming from the sound system - leading us to the death of John Cricket, which happens using a theatrical blank gun, which was never hollow but explodes real powder, making its sound source as realistic as it safely gets, which always evoked a gasp from the audience.

My intention with that was to build the progression from fake finger guns to the reality that suddenly hits us towards the end of the jarring first half of the show. This progression of violence kept the audience on edge and eager to stay for the second half of the show - what could possibly happen now that our beloved Cricket got killed right in front of us?



Figure 19: Top of Act 2, the final judgment

Reminder to Self: if I develop and employ clear theatrical language, I will gain the audience's trust and buy-in when we start escalating things, even if it is scary. This work will allow me to make bolder choices with an audience now willing to go where we plan to take them.

The Biggest Lesson is That This is Not For You - To be creating a Latine piece of theatre that celebrates the endurance of the migrant at its climax in a deeply polarized country is special. I also have no control over what resonates with folks, but to be met at the stage door by an Indigenous Brazilian in tears for seeing herself represented or talking to community members who, like our playwright, had a loved one murdered by those supposed to protect us, and decided to channel this grief into something transformative speaks to the power of stories.

Reminder to Self: Making theatre is to invite all to be a part of something bigger than themselves. And in that manner, this play is bigger than me. It becomes bigger the moment someone else believes in it.



Figure 20 - Working with the actors playing the Cangaceiros for Severino's Flashback



Figure 21: Final Staging of Severino's Flashback

Conclusion

It is impossible to separate myself from the work I do - I engage in it because I care about it, and at the same time, it is not about me. To quote John Cricket, *"That's a mighty strange combination"*. Storytelling is a powerful tool for resistance and community engagement. And to engage in community is scary, it requires rigor and intentionality. To gather in the theatre around a story is like gathering around a fire; our cultural roots and ancestral stories just might have some wisdom for us to pull from if we stop and take the time to listen as we attempt to build a future together.

Directing *The Rogue's Trial* has been a transformative experience. It challenged me artistically and reinforced my belief in theatre as a means to provoke thought and inspire action. Every narrative holds a gift; in this play, the gift is the message of mercy and resilience, which I desperately need right now.

I know that the journey of directing is ongoing. My hope with my work is to inspire others to see the value in our popular storytelling as a way to confront reality, nurture hope, and create meaningful dialogue within communities. May my work be an invitation for caring.



Figure 22: Our set before the actors come in and bring the show to life

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