

MIRROR OF THE INVISIBLE WORLD DRAMATURG'S STATEMENT

Mirror of the Invisible World is a dramaturg's dream play. Multi-layered, rich in history, written with truths revealed in riddles and covering seven countries in three continents, it required extensive research to uncover the play's mysteries. Full of surprises and rewards, the process was a challenge from beginning to end and utilized the dramaturg's contributions to the fullest. I started the research process last spring when I immersed myself into the broader aspect of Islamic Culture. Throughout the summer I started narrowing down the information to share with the production team in the early fall. During the rehearsal process, I was in the rehearsal room to answer questions, monitor details, and help solve problems. In addition, I shared the gathered material for *Mirror* with the publicity team, so they could accurately reflect our production.

One of the major challenges of this production was discovering "the physical action" of the play. Mary Zimmerman adapted this play from a famous 12th century Persian poem called *Haft Paykar* by Nizami of Ganjavi, and she directed it herself in 1997 and 2007 at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago. Since she has not yet published the play, Ms. Zimmerman has not added stage directions to her script. We received her working copy of the play with little to no information beyond the lines. Physical action, dance, fights and songs were not specified, but simply called "action" or "dance." I searched for the physical requirements of the scenes by studying the complete translation of the poem that was adapted by the playwright. Another challenge was that the 8 actors played more than 60 characters. The script did not include a complete list of characters or indicate who played which roles. Production photos of the Goodman productions gave some suggestion of character doubling, though that was arranged anew for our production.

Besides analyzing different translations of the poem, both in verse and prose, I also explored iconographic research by examining not just the traditional Persian miniatures, but also other illustrated books with images of scenes represented in the play. The visual research revealed the shape of the dramaturgical work and how the written words could be transposed to images, thereby giving the director, choreographer and actors clues on how to stage and embody those moments.

The dramaturgical work of a play is like building the foundation of a house. The hidden structure provides the beautiful and secure framework for the production. The opportunity to learn not just about the script itself, but also to collect information from art forms: such as visual arts, poetry, music and dance in order to find effective ways of using them, to create a theatrical production most intrigued me as a dramaturg for this production.

The result of this work will be a formal thesis that will be available online. People beyond UNO's campus will have access to the research conveniently located in one place. Bringing other scholars' work together may inform future productions of the play. In our contemporary world, the Middle East is best known by its rich wells of oil and, sadly, wars. Through this project I had the opportunity to investigate the Islamic culture and its great works of art, bringing to light the richness of its golden past and making stories that at first seemed strange, feel familiar.

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