



a Post-Electric Play

by Anne Washburn music by Michael Friedman
directed by Jeremy Aluma

In the Healy Theatre

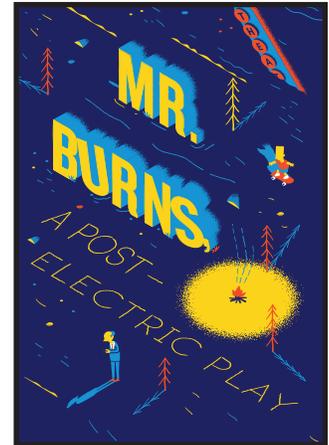
Dramaturgy by
Trisha Mahoney, BFA4/
Dramaturgy/Criticism;
Mary Kate O’Gara, BFA2/
Dramaturgy/Criticism

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Survival Through Story

You are scientifically more likely to remember a potential danger if it is told to you in story form. It makes more of an emotional impact on you if you learn the story of your friend’s/cousin’s/nephew’s awful demise because of that dragon in that one particular cave in the mountain. Much more of an impact than if someone just told you to avoid that cave. This is because human beings use stories to convey information that is too important to forget.

So how does Anne Washburn turn a three-act retelling of an episode of *The Simpsons* into a statement on the necessity of storytelling for survival? I’m glad you asked. The characters within Washburn’s play not only use the story of *The Simpsons* to distract themselves from their post-apocalyptic horror of a world, but as a way to regain the life that they had before. In a world where they have been thrust into horror, they use their stories to connect with each other in a way that they otherwise would not be able to do when they are unsure of where the next threat is coming from. Storytelling, whether a personal story or the 83rd episode of *The Simpsons*, has a habit of revealing the humanity in other people, a humanity that we tend to ignore in tumultuous times.



This speaks to the strength and importance of those who create and spread stories. In the tumultuous times that we live in now, how do we find the humanity that many have felt that we have lost in this country? We have to continue to ensure that stories are told. They are a necessity of survival, after all.

~Trisha Mahoney



Anne Washburn
(Photo from herbalpertawards.org)

Get To Know Anne Washburn

From humble beginnings, Anne Washburn has had her work produced nationwide. As the daughter of a painter, she was brought up in a creative home and quickly showed her aptness for great creativity as well. An alumni of Reed College and New York University, Washburn’s most notable works include *A Devil at Noon*, *Apparition*, *10 Out Of 12*, *The Internationalist*, and *The Communist Dracula Pageant*. Washburn has also adapted Euripides’s *Orestes* and *Iphigenia in Aulis*.

Washburn has been quoted in an interview saying that *Orestes* shaped her play, *Mr. Burns, a Post-Electric Play*. “*Orestes* is mayhem...It’s this mad and almost corrupt mash-up of the tragic and the comic and the ironic and the thriller-y, and has a more sophisticated command of tonal shift and just pure bravura entertainment than any contemporary play or performance text I know.”

In 2012, Washburn received a Drama Desk Nomination for Outstanding Production for *Mr. Burns, a Post-Electric Play*. Washburn has also received a Guggenheim fellowship, the Herb Alpert Award in the Arts and Theatre, and the Whiting Award. Chicago has most recently seen her work with Theater Wit’s 2017 production of *10 Out of 12*.

~Mary Kate O’Gara

Interview with the Director, Jeremy Aluma

Trisha Mahoney: *How would you describe Mr. Burns in one sentence?*

Jeremy Aluma: A post-apocalyptic play about humanity's ability to survive through storytelling.

TM: *What drew you to direct this particular play?*

JA: I'm constantly checking in with my peers about what plays I should read and what plays I should direct. Last summer, I emailed five people I trust, and three of the five recommended *Mr. Burns* to me. So already, I knew I had to read this play. Everyone says it's a great play.

Then I sat down and read the script. I usually give myself two reads to figure out if I really love the play. The first read can be tough because I immerse myself in the story. I love stories and so I'm not always able to discern the merits of a play based on a first read. But with this one, I was just blown away from start to finish; I could not get enough of it. Stylistically, it was right up my alley because it's very theatrical. It involves all the things I like to play with in theatre: mask, narration, ensemble, movement, high concept, and design.

For me, both the troupe of actors (The Civilians) who helped Anne Washburn build this show and the group of people within the play, both have an ensemble feel, a team mentality, which is something I am fascinated by, have experimented with, and want to do more of. That sense of community – a group of people creating something together – is very important for me as an artist.

TM: *Why do you think that this is an important story to tell now, in this season, in this school, in Chicago?*

JA: It is important because we are questioning whether theatre has an impact on society or not. For the last eight years we have been somewhat complacent in the theatre. This is a huge generalization, of course. But I think we are now realizing theatre should and can have an impact on people and the world. Figuring out how we do that is our primary job. At least, for me it is. We're not in an apocalyptic scenario, though we are beginning to see society tear apart, and we have to figure out how to put the pieces back together in a vision of what we want. As America splits at the seams, we have to figure out what is going to hold us together and how we are going to tell stories that help shape our future. It is an important thing for an artist to consider.

As for location, what I like about Chicago is that it seems to be a mix of the right and the left politically; the city proper is pretty liberal, but the surrounding area is more conservative. I think that is somewhat unique compared to other major cities, like Los Angeles, San Francisco, or New York. I think we have to speak to everybody; we can't just speak to like-minded audiences. If we are not actually doing anything, what is the point?

TM: *What is your favorite line from Mr. Burns?*

JA: "The whole world unfurls before me/ A great adventure lies before me/ I'm reaching out for everything/ I'm calling out to everything/ There's nothing I'm afraid to be/ The world is new and glittery/ I run to meet it hopefully."

Bart is referring to a past when everything was doomed, nothing was possible. Then all possibilities open up. The world deteriorated, and somehow anything becomes possible. That sentiment, the idea that anything is possible, is one I live everyday. I'm an optimist at heart. I believe within the confines of how the world exists, we can make anything happen. I think Bart hits on this point beautifully.



Jeremy Aluma
(Photo from jeremyaluma.com)