

Amanda Dawson, Ph.D.

Research Statement

My scholarly research speaks to various subfields in theatre and performance studies including topics in dramaturgical explorations, theatre for young audiences, pedagogy, and theatre and military historiography. Within each area of focus, an investigation of storytelling as part of human experience is at the forefront. Through storytelling, I narrow in on how theatre can examine this experience through its unique medium. Specifically, my current research examines cultural representations of the United States military on stage, particularly veterans of the Vietnam War and Iraq/Afghanistan wars.

In my dissertation, *Men, Memory, and Memorial: Vietnam Veteran Theatrical Narratives*, I investigated the narratives of wounded American Vietnam War veterans and how Vietnam veterans have been (are) presented on stage in three plays: *Medal of Honor Rag* (1976) by Tom Cole, *Still Life* (1982) by Emily Mann, and *Tracers* (1983) by John DiFusco, et al. My methodologies included a dramaturgical approach, which included textual analysis of the scripts, previous production research, historical and archival investigation of the war in Vietnam, as well as theoretical applications of performance studies and documentary theatre. I also used ethnographic research methods by interviewing a number of veterans including those with whom I performed in a production of *The Telling Project: Kansas City*. I also pursued a phenomenological study of Vietnam War memorials in Washington D.C., Texas, Indiana, and Kansas. I discovered how wounding (the moments of injury and its repercussions), coming home, and commemorating (via medals and memorials) continue to tell the tale of those who survived the war in Vietnam. I conclude that these narratives aid in shaping how audiences, and by extension the United States, view the Vietnam veteran. This research was funded by the Department of Theatre at The University of Kansas and the KU School of the Arts.

My research contributes to the study of documentary theatre and performance studies. This project is the first theatrical scholarship that combines a study of fictionalized veterans within these plays with ethnographic study of veterans and their commemoration. While the Vietnam War is one of the most written about wars, the plays that respond to the war have only minor academic scholarship published. Past scholarship has focused on play and musical texts written during the war or specifically protest theatre against the war. This research provides a means for future analysis of theatrical representations of war through the lens of the veteran who lived through war. Currently, a portion of my dissertation, on Tom Cole's *Medal of Honor Rag*, is under review for publication with the *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*.

My research also extends to my theatre practice. As a professional dramaturg, I worked as the Literary Manager and Resident Dramaturg for several years at the Unicorn Theatre, a professional theatre in Kansas City, Missouri with a forty-year history of regional and world premiere productions. There, I dramaturged over 15 productions, most of which were world or regional premieres. Based on my research on the Vietnam War, I was invited back to the Unicorn Theatre to dramaturg Qui Nguyen's *Vietgone* in Spring 2018. I am currently dramaturging a youth production – *Baba Yaga and the Black Sunflower* and *The Love for Three Oranges* - for the Owensboro Theatre Alliance. My next directing production will be *Bring It On: The Musical* for the Owensboro Theatre Alliance. Directing and dramaturging plays and musicals has informed classroom work and research agendas. New play development, including the Unicorn Theatre's In-Progress Play Reading

Series, which I ran while employed there, has allowed hands on practice in dramaturgy and directing.

The next research project will examine one-person plays that are told from the enlisted or veteran experience. I have begun writing an article that leads to this larger project, which looks at a new one-man documentary play, *Bond: A Soldier and His Dog* (2015) written by veteran and actor, Logan Black. This play has had several smaller productions in the Kansas City area and received its first professional production in Spring 2019. Documentary theatre allows for a journalistic approach to the person and their experiences. It requires a different relationship to the audience. This particular project will investigate Black's experiences in war, his own writing and performing of it, and his relationship to Diego, as well as Diego's appearance on stage. This will lead to the larger research project that will also include George Brant's *Grounded* (2013) (which I was the dramaturg for the National New Play Network's Rolling World Premiere at the Unicorn Theatre) and Marc Wolf's *Another American: Asking and Telling* (1999), among others.

Through my dissertation, and additional research projects, I affirm the need for scholarship that investigates these cultural representations of war and service men and women. The voices of those once-silent war veterans need to be shared beyond political purposes, but also as a means to communicate the human experience from the veteran perspective. A dramaturgical sensibility allows for a methodology, which includes various forms of research and disciplines.