

Villanova University Theatre Department
Education Guide for

Posterity

By Wendy MacLeod
Directed by Edward Sobel
November 8th - 19th, 2023

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About Villanova Theatre

Villanova Theatre is a community of artist-scholars committed to transforming hearts and minds through the visionary production of classical, modern, and contemporary dramatic literature.

Our work is fueled by the imaginative striving common to Villanova’s accomplished faculty, versatile staff, and energetic graduate students. Together, we are devoted to creating a vibrant theatre enriched by and overflowing with the ideas explored in our classrooms. In all of our endeavors, we aim to share the dynamic experience of collaborative learning with our audiences

in order to engage the intellect and stir the soul. As a facet of Villanova University, Villanova Theatre serves the campus community as well as thousands of theatregoers from the Main Line and the Greater Philadelphia area.

How to Use This Guide

This Education Guide is intended to help guide and inspire conversation, reflection and further research connected to Villanova Theatre's production of *Posterity* by Wendy MacLeod. It contains a series of Prompts and Extensions organized around the work itself, Villanova Theatre's production concept, and the broader themes of the Augustinian Cultural Seminar related to identity, culture, and community. They are designed to be used in any order and can be approached as singular topics for reflection or in combination with one another to support a more nuanced conversation about identity, culture, and inclusion.

Content Warning

Like all good art, *Posterity* asks audiences to engage with universal questions on a personal, sometimes challenging level. We offer the content advisory below to equip our audiences with the tools they need to engage with the performance in a meaningful and fulfilling way.

Posterity includes discussions and depictions of mental illness, including self-harm, suicidal ideation, and in-patient treatment; death by suicide; loss of a child; NICU treatment; descriptions of 9/11; mentions of war and mass casualty; Civil-War era language describing disability.

We also recognize that there is a difference between trauma and discomfort. Without the latter, we can narrow and limit our experiences in ways detrimental to ourselves as individuals and as members of this community. As the content mentioned above is integral to the plot of this play, however, we urge you to use your best judgment and exercise self-care as needed.

About *Posterity*

Time and Place Settings

From the Script:

"The play moves fluidly between different time periods: Rose and Henry (and sometimes Ginny) are in the present. Pearl, Lydia, Minnie and Thaddeus are in the Civil War era. Ginny, Hannah, Jasper and Sam are in the recent past. Ginny and Hannah's final scene is 15 years ago."

"The locations are a newspaper office, a Civil War farmhouse, a meadow, a hospital room, a wedding reception, a dorm room, a nurse's office, a rec room on a psych ward."

Meet the Playwright

A New Dramatists alum and a graduate of the Yale School of Drama, Wendy MacLeod is the James E. Michael playwright-in-residence at her alma mater, Kenyon College. Her plays are available through [Dramatists Play Service](#) and at [Playscripts.com](#). Her play *The House of Yes* became an award-winning Miramax film starring Parker Posey and was produced by many theaters including The Magic Theater, Soho Rep, The Washington Shakespeare Company, The Maxim Gorki Theater in Berlin, and The Gate Theater in London. Her other works for the stage include *Sin* and *Schoolgirl Figure*, both of which premiered at The Goodman, *Juvenilia* and *The Water Children*, both of which premiered at Playwrights Horizons, and *Things Being What They Are*, which premiered at Seattle Repertory Theatre, had an extended run at Steppenwolf in Chicago, and was produced by The Road Theatre in LA. She was the first writer selected for The Writer's Room residency at the Arden Theater in Philadelphia, where she wrote *Women in Jeopardy!* which was selected for The Kilroys' List and premiered at GEVA. *The Ballad of Bonnie Prince Chucky* was commissioned by and produced at ACT's Young Conservatory in San Francisco. Her prose has appeared in The New York Times, McSweeney's, Salon, POETRY magazine, and on NPR's All Things Considered.



Meet the Director

Edward Sobel is a Professor at Villanova. Previously, he was Associate Artistic Director at the Arden Theatre Company and Director of New Play Development at Steppenwolf Theatre Company, overseeing development of more than 40 new plays including Tracy Letts' Pulitzer and Tony Award-winner *August: Osage County*, and Pulitzer finalists *Red Light Winter* and *Man from Nebraska*. Directing credits include world premieres of James Ijames' *Moon Man Walk* and *The Most Spectacularly Lamentable Trial of Miz Martha Washington*; productions of *Endgame*, *Clybourne Park*, *Superior Donuts*, *Women in Jep* and *At the Old Place* at the Arden; *The Chosen*, *Huck Finn*, and *A Lesson Before Dying* at Steppenwolf, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Youth* and *Beckett Bites* at Villanova. Broadway credits as dramaturg include *The Minutes*, *Linda Vista*, *Superior Donuts*, and *August: Osage County*. Writers whose work he has developed and directed include Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa, Rachel Bonds, Lydia Diamond, Kristoffer Diaz, Laura Eason, Hannah Khalil, Nimisha Ladva, Wendy MacLeod, Rogelio Martinez, and Bess. [REDACTED] He is a recipient of the Elliot Hayes Award from the Literary Managers and of the Americas for outstanding contribution to the field. He holds a BA from the University of Pennsylvania and an MFA in directing from Northwestern.



Meet the Dramaturgs

Under the direction of founder Dr. Chelsea Phillips, the Villanova Theatre Dramaturgy Collective is comprised of graduate Theatre students who wish to refine their artistic, scholarly, and pedagogical skills as they prepare for careers in theatrical production, education, and community engagement.

Production Dramaturgs work behind-the-scenes as context makers. They collaborate with playwrights, directors, designers, and actors to provide multidisciplinary resources and insight that informs and supports nearly every aspect of the production process. |

The Education Dramaturgy program seeks to strengthen the relationship between Villanova Theatre and the wider Villanova community through exclusive access to productions and resources that enhance the artistic, scholarly, and cultural exchange between our audiences and our artists.



Emma Drennen (*left*) is the author of this guide and is a second-year graduate student in theatre. She plays the role of Hannah/Lydia in this production and is the Education Dramaturg for the 2023-2024 production season. Her credits at Villanova include Leonor in *House of Desires*, Bessie in *Sometimes the Rain, Sometimes the Sea*, and assistant stage-managing *Sunday in the Park with George*. She is point of contact for all dramaturgical questions for educators using this guide.

Reagan Venturi (*right*) is the production dramaturg for *Posterity* and a second-year graduate student in theatre. Her credits at Villanova include Sumner in *Men on Boats*, Johanna in *Chrysalis*, and assistant stage-managing *Sunday in the Park with George*. She is a Gender and Women's Studies graduate assistant.

Topics for Discussion

New Play Development

Villanova's Department of Theatre and Studio Art prides itself in its collaboration with living playwrights to produce new works. This play has never been brought into full production before, which means the actors in this production are originating their roles for the first time in a full production setting. Because the script is new, this also means that collaboration with Wendy MacLeod has been essential to the production process. Sometimes, due to casting considerations, space limitations, or directorial choices, parts of the script are changed in the new play development process. One of a production dramaturg's primary objectives when working on a new script is to support the development of the story alongside the production team and the playwright.

The field of new play development is ever evolving, and the director of this play, Edward Sobel, has had a significant hand in the way new plays are developed (see his bio for more details). One important consideration that Professor Sobel asks for when Villanova produces the play is that we do not claim "world premiere" status. This is because that status marker makes a play very appealing to other theatre companies. By allowing a playwright to market their play as not having yet had its "world premiere," we ensure that their work remains as marketable as possible.

A crucial element of new play development is asking and answering the question: "Why this play now?" As dramaturgs, we ask ourselves this question every time we produce a play. When working on a new play specifically, it is especially important to ask this question. Another way to approach this aspect of production is to ask: "What about the current moment makes this play powerful?"

Prompts

- **Why might "world premiere" status make a play more marketable to a theatre company?**
- **What elements of a play might need to be changed during production due to casting, direction, space, etc.? Why?**
- **Why *Posterity* now? Why not *Posterity* now?**

Staging and Performing Traumatic Events: The process of “De-Roling”

Posterity deals with many sensitive subjects, such as mental illness, death by suicide, war and death in combat, child abuse, and 9/11. When producing a play that deals with such heavy material, it is essential to develop rehearsal practices that support the wellbeing of all involved. Psychologically, it is important for actors to learn how to separate themselves from their role, meaning the character they portray. De-roling is a concept that originated in drama therapy but has become increasingly popular in the theatre world alongside growing awareness of mental health. For actors and other theatre professionals, de-roling means taking various steps at the end of a rehearsal to remind their bodies and minds that what they have rehearsed is not their real life.

It is a popular myth (sometimes perpetuated by Hollywood urban legends) that actors must “become” their characters. In fact, this practice is discouraged in many professional acting spaces and can be dangerous for both the actor and others involved in the process. It is far more conducive to a successful performance that the actor takes care of their body and mind.

There are several well-researched and successful de-roling methods that were put into practice for this production. For example, at the end of a rehearsal, the actors (and anyone else in the rehearsal room) state their name and something they will do when they get home before stepping out of the boundaries of the rehearsal area. Also, many actors opted to wear sample pieces of their costumes while rehearsing. This allowed the actor not only to get comfortable in the costume but to also have a method for making concrete the otherwise abstract process of stepping in and out of the role.

Prompts

- **What are some reasons you can think of that de-roling might help an actor who is playing a character experiencing mental illness?**
- **In addition to action, what other instances can you think of in which de-roling be helpful? (i.e., after playing a video game, reading a stressful book, watching a stressful movie, etc.)**
 - **What de-roling strategies have you used in these situations?**
- **Can you think of characters from TV or movies that may have had a negative impact on an actor?**

Photography and Stagecraft

This play explores the ethics of several types of photography, both contemporary and historical. Photographs play a significant role in the lives of each character in the play. For Jasper and Hannah, their mothers' photographs of them during vulnerable and developmental stages of their lives cause them to question if their privacy was respected. For Ginny and Henry, taking photographs of painful and difficult moments allows them to transform their pain into meaningful art that can be shared. For Gloria, a famous photo representing her father (explained more below) causes her to relive painful memories and negatively impacts her family's memories of her father. For Minnie, Lydia, and Pearl, an engraving of a photo of Thaddeus's body is all that is left of him after he dies in the battle of Antietam. For Sam, a photo of his mother allows him to treasure her memory in a more tangible way. For Rose, taking photos of her baby before she passes away will allow her to remember her brief life. Each character has their own complex and nuanced relationship to photography.

One photograph mentioned in the play (by description only - not by name or by photographer) is "The Falling Man." This photo is a famous image from the September 11th terrorist attacks in New York City. The photo depicts a man falling from a tower, presumably in an attempt to die a less painful death and to escape the burning building.

The photography of Matthew Brady is also mentioned. An engraving of a photograph of Thaddeus after his death is identified by his family in the Civil War era, and the photo sits on Henry's desk in the contemporary period of the play.

Through photography, *Posterity* explores the relationship between the ephemeral and the permanent. It poses significant questions about the ethics of photography and asks us to consider how tangible images impact our collective and individual memories.

Prompts

- **What photographs (personal or famous) stand out in your memory? What role do they play in how you interpret or feel about their subjects?**
- **Do photographers have a responsibility to document and preserve history in order for it to be remembered?**
- **Imagine it were possible to time-travel back to before the invention of photography. How would photographs of important historical events impact our perception or understanding of them? If you could, what event would you photograph?**

Additional Resources

[Villanova Counseling Services](#) 610-519-4050

[988 A Direct Link for Suicide Prevention and Crisis Support](#) 988

PA Support & Referral Helpline: 1-855-284-2494

Crisis Text Line: Text PA to 741741

Villanova Public Safety: 610-519-4444

Campus Ministry: 610-519-4080

Residence Life: Your R.A. / 610-519-4154

[Read more about De-Roling and Drama Therapy](#)

[VIDEO: Richard Drew on Capturing “The Falling Man”](#)

[More info on Mathew Brady’s Civil War photography](#)