

December 9, 2023

This is a brief report summarizing the collaborations and performance of [Rubén Mosquera](#)'s play *La Bella en su Jaula/The Beauty in Her Cage*, which was performed at JMU on Monday, November 13, 2023 at 7 pm at the Studio Theatre, part of the Forbes Performing Arts Center. The writer/director was here as were the two actresses who performed the play in Buenos Aires, Zoe Bertona and Natalia Vacis. The play tells the story of Argentina's first legally documented femicide which occurred in 1872, amidst the backdrop of the Yellow Fever epidemic which wracked Buenos Aires, Argentina, that year.

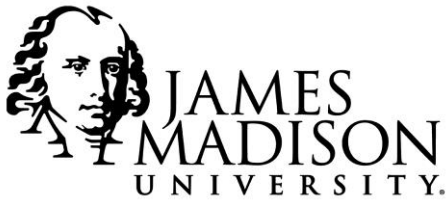
This report highlights JMU's role in bringing the play here but also includes important collaborations that arose out of it with other faculty and other institutions.

Conversations between Rubén Mosquera, Alicia López de Operé from UVA, and Kristen McCleary, at JMU began in December 2022. We all knew each other from an initial visit that Rubén had at UVA in 2018, where he was invited to share his play, *Las Putas de San Julián*, with UVA Spanish theater professors and students performing it. *Las putas de San Julián* is based on a chapter of Osvaldo Bayer's book *Patagonia Rebelde* (1972-1977), an indispensable account of the brutal repression of a rural workers' strike by the Argentine army between 1920 and 1922 in the province of Santa Cruz in Patagonia. The play takes place in February of 1922, and tells the story of five prostitutes in "La Catalana" brothel in Puerto San Julián who become symbols of the resistance to state authoritarianism, violence, and repression when they refuse to have sex with the "assassins" of the workers.

This is where I first met Rubén. Mosquera's work merges theater, history, memory, and gender in innovative productions, which relates closely to my interest in theater, history, and Latin American Studies. 2024 with University of Pittsburgh Press. *Las Putas de San Julian* figures in the conclusion of my book, *Staging Buenos Aires: Theater, Politics and Society in Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1860-1920*, (University of Pittsburgh Press, Spring 2024). Recently, students from JMU's summer study abroad which I co-direct with Dr. Blake, attended *Moldeada a imagen y semejanza [Molded in Image and Resemblance]* and *La bella en su jaula [The Beauty in Her Cage]* at the Actor Studio Teatro in Buenos Aires. They met Mosquera, the actors, and the leading actresses in *La bella en su jaula*.

Alicia and I formally invited Rubén to bring two actresses and the play to perform at our respective Virginia public institutions in January 2023. Peter Zazzali, the director JMU's School of

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Theatre and Dance, supported this visit with a letter of invitation, allowing us to perform the play one night in the Theatre Studio. Overtime other colleagues became involved with the project. Dr. Gonzalo Baptista coordinated a third performance of the play to his university, Morgan State, in Baltimore. Karina Baptista, Ph.D., translated the play into English.

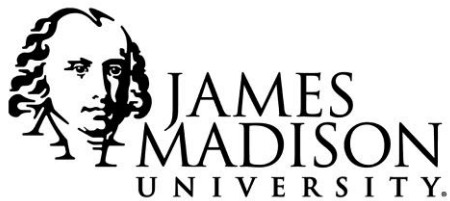
At JMU, the visit of the theater practitioners from Argentina, resulted in several collaborations and conversations laid the groundwork for future possible work together. When the group arrived to JMU, after first performing at UVA, on Sunday, November 12, Dr. Montes de Oca had organized a dinner with them and the Madison Hispanic Caucus. Ivan Guadarrama (the president of the MHC) joined us for lunch on Tuesday and gave the group a tour of the campus, as well. On Tuesday, Nov. 14, the playwright/director, Reuben, and the actresses, Zoe Bertona and Natalia Vacis, visited Dr. Yenisei Montes de Oca's class in Dept. of Foreign Language. Then they talked to my students in the afternoon (History of South America, Hist 447) where students from another class of Dr. Montes de Oca's literature course joined us as did students from Dr. Majo Delgadillo's English class. We had really wonderful conversations about the importance of critical thinking and theater in relationship to politics (military rule in Argentina and how theater contested authoritarianism) and cultural resistance to authoritarian rule. Reuben explained how integrated theater is in Argentina and advised our students to attend a play "at least once a week." Something that is easily doable in Buenos Aires.

The history department established further connections with the department of theater. I am going to meet with Brian Smallwood to converse about other possible collaborations between history and theater.

JMU was extremely generous with this visit and the three Argentine guests were impressed with our hospitality -- they stayed in Hotel Madison and could walk to the Theater Studio. We had lunch at D-hall which the actresses in particular really enjoyed. Every step of the way, JMU supported the visit and made it a success. This is one thing that definitely goes right at JMU—the generosity and support of the institution and colleagues and students—and I email this in part to hope we might continue cross-university collaborations. I will be meeting as one of many faculty with the gen ed integrative learning group in December with some of these ideas in mind.

I also pitched study abroad to Argentina to students—having them meet people from Argentina made that country better known in a variety of ways to our students. This deepens our students' understanding of the wider world, of course. Finally, I wanted to say that the visit was not only supported by JMU but also by the Argentine Workers Association so it was an international collaboration as well as a regional one.

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JMU courses that included the play in its content or offered students extra credit to attend the play:

JMU Classes that will integrate the play into their course syllabi:

Hist 300	Historical Methods (play read in class and extra credit offered)
Hist 447	History of South America (research, read and discussed play, class visit)
LAXC 252	Introduction to Latin America, Latinx, and Caribbean Studies (read play, extra credit to attend play)
SPAN 385	Latin American Short Story (class visit and attended play)
SPAN 335	Introduction to Hispanic Literature (read play, class visit)
WGSS 200	Introduction to Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies (extra credit)
ENG 496	Creative Writing (extra credit for class visit)

In addition, Dr. Kristen McCleary's Hist 447 (15 students) class prepared historical background of the era in South America. You can access the [Teaching guide here](#).

All of this work and these collaborations resulted in the play being performed to a full house at JMU. Of 110 seats, almost all were filled—this is no small feat for a Spanish-language play. Peter Zazzali and Brian Smallwood coordinated the visit and theater accessibility from the School of Theater and Dance at JMU. JMU theater students further supported the actual performance.

Sponsors:

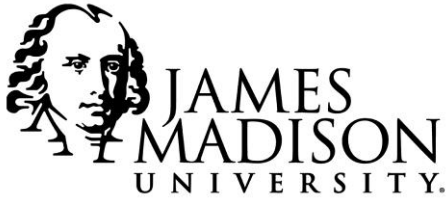
Asociación de Trabajadores del Estado (Argentina)

JMU:

Department of History
Department of Foreign Languages
College of Arts and Letters
Latin American, Latinx and Caribbean Studies
Center for Global Engagement
School of Theater and Dance
Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies

Bringing this play to JMU underscores the strong international as well as state-level collaborations of faculty and students that are cultivated and supported by study abroad and the mission of JMU. While this particular collaboration touches on all levels of engagement, it supports JMU's mission

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of Engaged Learning: Developing deep, purposeful and reflective learning, through classroom, campus, and community experiences in the pursuit, creation, application and dissemination of knowledge, in particular.

Thank you for supporting this play, international collaborations, local knowledge about Argentina and Latin America, and the humanities at JMU.

Sincerely,

Kristen McCleary

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