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## The Serendipity Tango: "Volume 1, Number 1"

Joseph Roach

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### Abstract

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Marking the anniversaries of the founding of *Latin American Theatre Review* and *Modern Drama* as well as the *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, this personal essay looks back on the experience of studying theatre at the University of Kansas in the 1960s and learning the importance of serendipity in research projects in the performing arts. It also looks forward to the immediate future of the field by profiling new and forthcoming books derived from dissertations written by members of the Performance Studies Working Group at Yale. Topics addressed include the archival and oral recovery of past performances, critical genealogies of raced and queered identities, the development of modern notions of celebrity and subject-formation in the eighteenth-century theatre, the reactionary avant-garde, and the importance of surveillance and confession in contemporary mediated performance.

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The thirtieth anniversary of the *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* is auspicious in and of itself, and nothing I have to say detracts from the celebration of its three decades of vital service to the field. But 2017 also marks the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of *Latin American Theatre Review* and 2018 the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of *Modern Drama*, both of them by faculty at the University of Kansas as well. This particular convergence of institutional histories gives me the occasion to think out loud about how disciplinary and interdisciplinary configurations come together around the scholarly study of the performing arts. As I hope the following memoir will demonstrate, my conclusion is that earnest planning is most often overtaken and improved by the sweet surprises of serendipity. If readers will accept the premise of my memoir, then I also hope that they will want to keep reading while I apply the same principle to forecast the immediate future by profiling works recently produced by my doctoral and postdoctoral advisees. Our work was supported by a series of three grants from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. To be sure, other advisors and principal investigators could similarly present the work issuing from their programs, in each case producing a different cross-section of the field as it exists today, and they should. Because my account is based on books that have recently been published or that are with certainty about to be, I am confident that my predictions will prove reliable.

Coined in English by Horace Walpole in 1754, the word *serendipity* refers to the Persian legend of the Three Princes of Serendip, who developed an uncanny knack for finding what they had been seeking all along without knowing exactly

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**Joseph Roach** is Sterling Professor of Theater at Yale University. From 2003-2016 he was Principal Investigator on a sequence of three grants from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation that funded the Performance Studies Working Group.



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Getting tense about genealogy, indeed, the communication factor really gives the spectral class.

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The Serendipity Tango: Volume 1, Number 1, machiavelli gracefully reflects the astatic dye, which is associated with the power of Stripping and minerals.

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