The Guide

A theatergoer’s resource edited by the Education & Community Programs department at Portland Center Stage

The Typographer’s Dream
By Adam Bock

Education & Community Programs Staff
Kelsey Tyler
Education & Community Programs Director
Paul Susi
Education & Community Programs Coordinator
Matthew B. Zrebski
Resident Teaching Artist
Brenna Warren
Education Intern

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Synopsis

A typographer, a geographer, and a stenographer explore the connections between profession, self, and interpersonal relations. Are you your work? If you are, what do you do when you hate your job? Through the use of monologues and flashbacks, Adam Bock explores identity, and whether it stems from the inside or from others’ perceptions.


Adam Bock, Playwright

Adam Bock’s plays include Phaedra (Shotgun Players) A Small Fire (Playwrights Horizons, Drama Desk nomination), book for We Have Always Lived in the Castle, with music by Todd Almond (Yale Rep), The Flowers (About Face Theatre), The Receptionist (MTC, 2008 Outer Critics nomination, Best Plays of 2007-2008, The Evidence Room with Megan Mullally), The Drunken City (Playwrights Horizons, 2008 Outer Critics nomination), The Thugs (Soho Rep, 2007 OBIE Award for Playwriting), The Shaker Chair (2005 Humana Festival), Swimming In The Shallows (Shotgun Players, Second Stage Uptown, 2000 BATCC Award, Cluuder Prize), Five Flights (Encore Theatre and Rattlestick Playwrights Theater, 2002 Glickman Award, ACTA nomination, Osborn nomination), Marcy Comes Home, and The Typographer’s Dream (Encore Theatre/Shotgun Players). Adam is the resident playwright at Encore Theatre, and a Shotgun Players Artistic Associate. He is a NEA grantee, a three-time resident at Yaddo, a former member of the Soho Rep Writer/Director Lab, a NYTW Usual Suspect, and a TDF Open Doors mentor. Adam’s plays are published by Samuel French, Dramatists Play Service and Playscripts, Inc. He is a 2012 Guggenheim grantee, a NEA grantee, a Guernsey Award-winner, a three-time resident at Yaddo, a former member of the Soho Rep Writer/Director Lab, a NYTW Usual Suspect, and a TDF Open Doors mentor. He is a proud member of New Dramatists.

www.newdramatists.org/adam-bock
Adam Bock & PCS

PCS is proud to have a long-standing relationship with this talented playwright. In particular, Director Rose Riordan & Adam Bock have collaborated on several projects over the years. Here’s a look at past productions brought to life by the Adam & Rose team. Actors Sharonlee McLean, Laura Faye Smith, and Kelsey Tyler have all been involved with many of these projects.

- **The Thugs.** After it was workshopped in 2005 at the JAW Festival, *The Thugs* ran late-night under Rose’s direction in the Ellyn Bye Studio during PCS’s first season in the Armory. In that production, Sharonlee played Mercedes, Laura Faye played Diane, and Kelsey played Bart.

- **The Receptionist.** After a successful run at CoHo Productions in Portland, PCS remounted this dark comedy. Directed by Rose, starring Sharonlee McLean and Laura Faye Smith in 2010.

- In 2011, PCS Associate Artistic Director Rose Riordan directed Bock’s adaptation of *Phaedra* for Shotgun Players in Berkeley, CA.

- Bock’s script *San Diego* was selected out of over 200 submissions for inclusion in the 2012 JAW Festival. Among the challenges to be worked out on stage was a baby carriage prop that had to float away to sea.

- **A Life.** PCS, with the financial support of Perkins Coie and their “Creative Minds” program, commissioned Bock to write a new play. This commission became *A Life* and was workshopped at JAW 2014 with Sharonlee, Laura Faye, Kelsey and Danny Wolohan.
Typography

“Typography is art with a purpose. Driven by functionality, the typographer’s painstaking craft is dedicated towards the creation of legible and readable characters for printing…. A typographer’s responsibilities simply involve the meticulous and careful design of fonts and typefaces.”


Geography

“Geography is unique in bridging the social sciences and the natural sciences. There are two main branches of geography: human geography and physical geography. Human geography is concerned with the spatial aspects of human existence. Physical geographers study patterns of climates, landforms, vegetation, soils, and water.”


Stenography/Court Reporting

“Stenographers use stenotype machines that allow users to record shorthand versions of sounds or words. This system is roughly based on the phonetic sounds of words, allowing stenographers to press multiple keys at one time to make entire words. Although they may often work during court hearings or other legal proceedings, stenographers can also be found at business meetings, press conferences and training seminars…. A stenographer’s job begins with the creation of a computer dictionary of words and partial words that is used to translate the stenotype machine keystrokes into text. After transcribing events, stenographers must then prepare and edit the written transcripts to ensure proper spelling of names and places, correct grammar and accurate terminology. They may also provide copies of transcripts as requested.”


A Typographer, a Stenographer and a Geographer Walk Into A Bar... By Claudie Fisher, Public Relations and Publications Manager, PCS

Typography—from the Greek words ‘typos’ (impression or cast) and ‘graphie’ (writing)—is the art and technique of arranging type. Type design is the art of creating typefaces.

- Typography as a craft has its origins in the first punches and dies used to make seals and currency in ancient times.
- Perhaps the most widely used typeface, Times New Roman, was created for the British newspaper The Times in 1931. It was eventually adopted for use in Microsoft products, starting in 1992 with Windows 3.1
- Font paralysis is the inability to finish your project because you can’t decide which font to use.
- The digital age brought typography into the hands of laypeople. Today practically everyone is a typographer, but the art is best left to trained designers who are enjoying increased demand, due in large part to the growth of the Internet.

Stenography—from the Greek words ‘stenos’ (narrow) and ‘graphie’ (writing—is the art or process of writing in shorthand, especially from dictation or oral discourse.

- A typical shorthand system provides symbols or abbreviations for words and phrases, which allow someone to write as quickly as people speak.
- A modern day example of shorthand is the myriad letter homophones commonly used in texting, such as “btw” (by the way) and “lol” (laugh out loud).
- The speed of speech varies greatly. The average speaking rate in a TED talk is 163 words per minute (wpm). The fastest talkers on record reach over 600 wpm.
- Stenotype keyboards enable trained users to input text as fast as 225 wpm, which is the minimum speed needed to become certified by the National Court Reporters Association
- The Stenograph was invented by newspaper reporter Miles Bartholomew and patented in 1879.
- Today court reporters use stenotype machines, as well as digital recording devices. While audio recording is replacing some court reporters, the outlook is still good for this growing field.

Geography—from the Greek word ‘geographia’ (earth description)—is the scientific study of the Earth’s surface and its physical features, climate, products and populations.

- The two major fields of study in geography are physical geography and human geography.
- The growing influence and rise in prominence of scientific enquiry in Europe was represented in the famous painting, The Geographer, created by Dutch artist Johannes Vermeer in 1668-1669.
- An important development in the field of geography was the establishment of the common prime meridian as a reference for charts and maps. In 1884, 25 nations met in Washington, D.C. for the International Meridian Conference to select the official prime meridian (0˚ longitude), which passes through the Royal Observatory in Greenwich, London.
- The development of many geographic societies occurred during the 19th century, including the National Geographic Society in 1888.
- Today geography is a small occupational group, but the number of jobs available nationally is expected to grow faster in the next 10 years than the average growth of all occupations.

Glossary of terms:

Tectonic plates: A massive, irregularly shaped slab of solid rock making up the earth’s crust.

Ice floes: A mass of floating ice at sea. Size varies. Synonymous with “Iceberg.”

Steno machine: A specialized chorded keyboard or typewriter used by stenographers for shorthand use.

Choke Point: A narrow water passageway between two bodies of land.

Panama Canal: A canal extending SE from the Atlantic to the Pacific across the Isthmus of Panama.

Strait of Gibraltar: A strait between Europe and Africa at the Atlantic entrance to the Mediterranean.

Pillars of Hercules: An ancient term for the Strait of Gibraltar. In Greek mythology, Hercules is said to have created the Strait by smashing through a giant mountain, thus allowing mankind to explore beyond the Mediterranean basin. He erects two pillars on either side of the Strait to memorialize the feat, and mark the boundaries of Europe, Africa and the known world. The Rock of Gibraltar is one of these pillars; the identity of the other, on the African side, is disputed.

Ceuta: A seaport and enclave of Spain in Northern Morocco, on the Strait of Gibraltar.

Umlaut: A mark that looks like two dots placed over a vowel to indicate a specific, extended pronunciation. Usually a “u” in German.

Ring Accent: A mark that looks like a little oval placed over a vowel to indicate a specific, softened pronunciation. Also called a “whispered” vowel.

Cedilla: A mark that looks like a little swishy tail placed beneath the letter c, as in the spelling of the French word garçon, to indicate that the letter is to be pronounced like an “s”.

Dogsheet: “The dogsheet is where you write down everything that might give you trouble, the correct spellings of people’s names, addresses, lawyer’s names, anything, everything, anything that you might end up otherwise calling the lawyer in the middle of the night and waking him or her up…” (The Typographer’s Dream, Dave).

Diskette: Floppy disk.

Rose Colored Glasses song: A popular country song in 1978. Co-written and performed by John Conlee on the album of the same name, also co-written by George Baber.

For Discussion/Activities:

How does the playwright manipulate time throughout the play? How does this illuminate the relationships between Annalise, Margaret and Dave?

• What are the “consequences” referred to in Annalise’s line, “...We chronicle consequences. And to acknowledge consequences is unpoltic.”

• Consider Margaret’s line, “How do you capture the emotion in the sounds? How do you capture the play of feelings in the language...?” Consider how you express the play of feelings in the language you use with close friends and intimates. What are the tools you rely upon to convey feeling?

• Study a regional map of your location. Do you feel “ownership” or “belonging”? Why or why not?

• Consider Dave’s line, “You start connecting to the people whose stories you hear.” Do you connect to his story? Why or why not?

• How does your occupation define your identity? Are you your job?

• How precisely do you repeat stories or experiences? Does your language change depending on who’s in the room? Why?

• Record a conversation using your smartphone, or a similar device, and attempt to transcribe it. What are the challenges of accurate transcription?