DIRECTED BY
LOLA B. PIERSON

BY
CALLIE KIMBALL

NOVEMBER 1-18, 2018
From the Dramaturg

Women have traditionally been defined by relationships; in particular, by heterosexual relationships with men and as the nurturers of children. But what happens to a woman when she does not fit in to those traditional structures, either by choice or circumstance? How does she define herself outside of these cultural structures, particularly, as she ages, outside the maternal paradigm?

In this play, Things That Are Round, playwright Kimball explores psychologically complex female relationships which disrupt such traditional role expectations while still struggling to embrace the freedom outside those structures. With no guides, we first try to re-create the structures. The next step is to explode the structures and create new paradigms.

Roundness symbolically connects to the female physical experience—swelling and ripening, cycles, ovulation, pregnancy. But the roundness can also show connection, a world made together. Language games, theater games. We create the world for each other through this imaginative transformation.

—Lisa A. Wilde
“At best, I hope to bring stories and characters to life that we don’t see enough of.”

Callie Kimball earned her MFA under Tina Howe at Hunter College, where she won the Rita & Burton Goldberg Playwriting Award two years in a row. Her plays have been produced and developed in New York, Chicago, LA, and DC, at the Kennedy Center, Portland Stage Company, Lark Play Development Center, Halycon Theatre, Florida Studio Theatre, Greater Boston Stage Company/Stoneham Theatre, Echo Theatre, The Brick Theater, Project Y Theatre, Team Awesome Robot, Washington Shakespeare Company, Everyman Repertory Theatre, Absolute Theatre, Mad Horse Theatre, The Drama League, and many colleges and festivals across the country.

She’s an Affiliate Artist at Portland Stage Company, an Affiliate Writer at the Playwrights’ Center, Playwright-in-Residence at Theater at Monmouth, and a former MacDowell Fellow. She won a Ludwig Vogelstein grant to research her play “Sofonisba,” which won the Clauder Gold Prize, was a finalist for the O’Neill, a semifinalist for the Princess Grace Award, and was included on The Kilroys’ 2016 List. The play has had readings at the National Museum of Women in the Arts and at the Farnsworth Museum, and is one of four winning plays at the 2017 Ashland New Plays Festival.

Her first teaching job was teaching Shakespeare in a juvenile detention facility, and she has taught playwriting to over 1,000 students through various nonprofit arts organizations and colleges. Academic articles about her plays have appeared in Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation, and in Comedia Performance: A Journal of the Association for Hispanic Classical Theater (forthcoming).

Her themes range from historical dramas and classical adaptations to socio-political comedies and futuristic dystopias. Many of her plays explore emotional violence and parasitic relationships, with characters who live at the intersection of language and power, and struggle to break free from the constraints of class, race, gender, and systemic abuse.

Some have described her plays as feminist, which is lovely, but really she just writes plays where the main characters have jobs and goals and happen to be women.
A CONVERSATION WITH CALLIE KIMBALL “DEEP SEA DIVER”  
By Dr. Lisa Wilde, September 2018

LW: I’m always fascinated by where the ideas for plays come from. You write in a range of genre, including historical dramas. How do you get started on plays generally and specifically, what was the beginning for Things That Are Round?

CK: Ideas are easy. It’s choosing an idea that’s hard. Time helps. I’ll get an idea, make a few notes, then forget about it for a year. If the idea keeps bubbling up, and if it seems to grow over time in a way that makes me think it’s worth writing and is worth a few hours of an audience’s time, I’ll settle in. I smashed a lot of random ingredients together to start this play—an imaginary child, the dreams and failures of ordinary working women, and my own hearing disorder. I wrote the first scene of the play in the spring of 2012, and it had a few readings in New York. I picked it up again in earnest in the summer of 2015 at a retreat at the Lark Play Development Center, and developed it over the next few years with several more workshops and retreats at the Lark and at Portland Stage. Six years and 37 revisions later, I’m finally happy that the play has found its fullest expression. I’m picky about whether to even start a play in the first place, because I know it’s going to be a long and complicated process.

LW: The title of the play seems connected to the ideas of monadology and the eternal aspect of monads and the title “rondo.” Are there other meanings?

CK: This is not top shelf feminism I’m about to serve up, but here goes. Atoms are round. Planets are round. Women’s bodies, our very portals into existence, are round. Female energy is often felt as embracing—whether it’s how we’re socialized or if it’s intrinsic to our sex I don’t know. The energy of creation is often circular, as are centrifugal and centripetal forces. The female orgasm is often reached with circular movement around a circular organ; it’s a shared story that can require an oblique approach and retreat before finding resolution. You can scientifically dissect and argue these points, but there is something specifically female about the structure of this play. Nina and Tetherly circle each other, share a story, approach and retreat, and explode into a new world at the very end. Right before the Epilogue, Tetherly repeats the first line of the play, bringing the story full circle. The end of the play is a beginning.

LW: How do the titles for the scenes operate? They seem to have strong operal/music connections. How do they connect to the audience’s experience of the play?

CK: I like to write with a looseness and sense of play. Half of what I write is just me taking mad swipes at ideas, usually while staring down an impossible deadline. I find that a choice made during a mad swipe often ends up echoing a deeper theme in the play or serving as a useful metaphor that I couldn’t have anticipated. It’s really for an audience to say how (or whether) the scene titles work, but I like to think that the melodrama of opera both supports and counters the action of the play. Traditional opera often trades on stereotypes, and at first blush, the two characters are stereotypes we’ve encountered before—a wealthy, neurotic, middle-aged white woman, and a scrappy, impetuous, young Latinx woman. About ten minutes into the first scene, we realize that all our assumptions will be upended, and the two continue to trade power moves in unexpected and sometimes shocking ways. The recurrent use of opera tropes anchors the women in a structure from which they repeatedly break.

LW: Why do you write for the theater? I was intrigued by the article you wrote in which you described it as “writing an ocean.” Could you talk more about that and maybe about the teaching of Tina Howe? I am also interested in how art and knowledge are shared/transferred.
CK: At best, I hope to bring stories and characters to life that we don’t see enough of. I think every play I’ve written has required that people of different races interact with each other in matter-of-fact ways, and that’s always been important to me. In the years since I wrote that piece for NPR, I’ve shifted away from the impulse to write an ocean. I do not write to order my chaotic inner life. I do not write to change the world. I am no longer an idealist. I suppose like most people, I do what I do because it’s the thing I’ve done the longest. My joke bio is “I rewrite stories over many years so that maybe someone who knows someone somewhere might someday pay me for the right to force people to memorize the story and repeat it nightly to people who make more money than I do,” and that’s pretty much it, so I’m also a bartender and a management consultant to counter the isolation of writing.

Tina is a fairy godmother of a teacher. Any time someone sees and understands you and your work deeply it is transformative. There were four of us in the inaugural MFA class at Hunter, and we are all still close. That is largely due to Tina’s influence—she fosters ideas of abundance and generosity, and we each bloomed under her care. I always felt like I bait-and-switched Tina because she took me into the program on the strength of my play “Sofonisba,” a glittery period drama, and then semester after semester I turned out these outlandishly dark plays set in submarines, brothels, and storage facilities. She took to calling me her “deep-sea diver,” and I liked that.

LW: You started your playwriting career in Washington, DC. What does it feel like to have a world premiere in the town in which it all began?

CK: The DC area will always hold a special place in heart because it’s where I began my teaching, corporate, and theatre careers. I was inspired by Howard Shalwitz at Woolly Mammoth when it was on Church Street and by Michael Kahn at The Shakespeare Theatre when it was still in residence at the Folger. I saw Longacre Lea’s first show, which was Kathleen Akery’s production of “Macbeth” in a small space at the old Arena Stage. My first theatre friend was Renee Calarco, when we both took Floyd King’s comedy class at The Shakespeare Theatre, and now we’re both award-winning playwrights. My first play ever, a 10-minute piece, was produced at the old Source Theatre Festival, and my play “MAY 39th” was in the first ever Capital Fringe Festival. My first full-length play, “Lulu Fabulous,” was produced by Phoenix Theatre in the back of the bar Playbill on 14th Street. Christopher Henley at Washington Shakespeare commissioned two plays from me, an adaptation of “The Rape of Lucrece,” and an adaptation of Aristophanes’ “Peace.” When I left DC for New York, it was because I knew that the larger theatres were unlikely to produce the work of a local playwright. This was before there was a focus on elevating local and female-identified writers—now DC has all sorts of initiatives and festivals, but at the time, ten years ago, I could see that there was no path forward for me here. Frankly, I never expected to be back, and this is only happening because I now live in Maine, and Grace Bauer, an actor who played Tetherly in a reading of “Things That Are Round” at Portland Stage, and who also works at Rep Stage occasionally, brought it to Artistic Director Joseph Ritsch’s attention. So it’s both very meaningful and also very unexpected. I’m so grateful to everyone here at Rep Stage for loving this play and bringing it to such vivid life.

—www.calliekimball.com
—www.starneskimball.com
**Structure**

Playwright Kimball has described the play as “George and Martha meet Thelma and Louis” referring to the main characters in Edward Albee’s 1962 Theater of the Absurd play *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf* and the 1991 film *Thelma and Louise*, written by Callie Khouri, directed by Ridley Scott and starring Susan Sarandon and Geena Davis. In both works, the characters play imaginative games, taking on roles and alternate realities denied them in their daily lives. Both works—like Kimball’s play—begin in recognizable domestic spaces suggesting we are in realism and then the rules and expectations suddenly shift. In Albee’s writing, this suggests Theater of the Absurd. In *Things that Are Round*, this sense of the absurd or surreal is heightened by the use of projected titles before each scene and stage directions such as “Time jumps. Also, the living room shifts a bit.”

In the film *Thelma and Louise*, the title characters decide to leave their dreary everyday lives for a weekend away, but as soon as they begin to express their independence, various men try to re-impose boundaries by threatening, attacking and conning them. The women then take on the roles of outlaws, breaking free and going on the lam in the West.

In *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, the characters of George and Martha exchange barbs about the education, childraising, and ultimately death of an absent child, taking on the memories and responsibilities of parents in front of the audience of Honey and Nick, only to reveal that the child is imaginary and this has been an elaborate secret game they have played together.

**Themes**

**LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN (1889-1951) AND LANGUAGE GAMES**

Wittgenstein was an influential Austrian philosopher of logic, math and language whose book *Philosophical Investigations* is considered one of the seminal books in cognitive science.

**Premises:**

All language (which may be non-verbal) is a game with rules that may change at any moment. The rules are not agreed upon or discussed in advance.

We should approach interactions as if they are games whose rules we want to learn.
“It would be helpful at this point to mention the distinction made by Searle between constitutive rules and normative rules (1969 and 1995). Constitutive rules create the game and define it; without them it would not exist. Normative rules indicate which actions are legitimate and which are not within the area created by the constitutive rules. For example, playing poker with a few aces up one’s sleeve is against the normative rules; however, trying to win at poker by building up the largest possible number of spades in one’s hand is against the constitutive rules. When the normative rules are broken, we conclude that the player made a mistake or cheated; when the constitutive rules are broken, we feel slightly perplexed, and may think that the player is playing some other game that we will never quite grasp. When Wittgenstein talks about “grammar”, he is referring to the constitutive rules.” (Nicolas Xanthos).

Examples of games:

“Giving orders, and obeying them –
Describing the appearance of an object, or giving its measurements –
Constructing an object from a description (a drawing) –
Reporting an event –
Speculating about an event –
Forming and testing a hypothesis –
Presenting the results of an experiment in tables and diagrams –
Making up a story; and reading it –
Play-acting –
Singing catches –
Guessing riddles –
Making a joke; telling it –
Solving a problem in practical arithmetic –
Translating from one language into another –
Asking, thinking, cursing, greeting, praying.”

—(Wittgenstein, 1958, pp. 11-12)

These are experienced through moves rather than rules.

BECHDEL TEST

Bechdel Test is a method for evaluating the portrayal of women in fiction. It asks whether a work features at least two women who talk to each other about something other than a man. The requirement that the two women must be named is sometimes added. The test is used as an indicator for the active presence of women in films and other fiction, and to call attention to gender inequality in fiction.

Also known as the Bechdel–Wallace test, it is named after the American cartoonist Alison Bechdel, in whose comic strip, Dykes to Watch Out For, the test first appeared, in 1985. Bechdel credited the idea to a friend, Liz Wallace, and to the writings of Virginia Woolf.
THINGS THAT ARE ROUND

References

LA BOHEME BY GIACOMO PUCCINI

World premiere: Teatro Regio, Turin, 1896. La Bohème, the passionate, timeless, and indelible story of love among young artists in Paris, can stake its claim as the world’s most popular opera. La Bohème is the definitive depiction of the joys and sorrows of love and loss. It also reveals the deep emotional significance hidden in the trivial things—a bonnet, an old overcoat, a chance meeting with a neighbor—that make up our everyday lives. The opera tells the story of a love affair between a poor poet (Rodolfo) and an equally poor seamstress (Mimi) in 19th century Paris. The opera is based on a book by Henri Murger called Scenes from Bohemian Life. Mimi is dying of tuberculosis. She and Rodolfo separate over a misunderstanding but reunite in the final scenes where he gives her a pink bonnet in memory of a happy outing as she dies in his arms. The opera served as the basis for the hugely successful Jonathan Larson musical Rent which updated the play to AIDS ravaged New York.

Mimi is Nina’s “dream role.” She says “all the stories in opera are big. That’s why I like them” then proceeds to make up her version of Puccini: “she’s a little scatterbrained, but she’s a seamstress and she is stacked and bringing it. She lives in Paris and falls in love with this guy Rudy who runs out on her when she comes down with anorexia because he can’t deal with how strong and complex she is. And then he gets paranoid she’s screwing around EVEN THOUGH IT’S ABSOLUTELY NONE OF HIS BUSINESS so in the end she kills Rudy after making him wear a dress.”

MONADOLOGY

According to her, Tetherley is writing a thesis on “Calculus, Microbes, and Sodium Chloride: A Lyrical, Spherical Proof for an Absolute Moral Circularity through a Rigorous Examination and Application of the Monadology.”

According to Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1717):
“The principle of change becomes an original, internal and active power of the thing constantly becoming the thing that it is, as the spontaneous happening and internal principle of the particular order of things which make up that substance. In other words, substances unfold, become the things God always knew them to be, in a time that is nothing other than precisely that becoming.”

A monad means that which is one, has no parts and is therefore indivisible. These are the fundamental existing things, according to Leibniz. His theory of monads is meant to be a superior alternative to the theory of atoms that was becoming popular in natural philosophy at the time. For Leibniz, monads suggested both immortality and God’s intelligent design.

Monads exist in philosophy, in programming, and in the natural world. Sodium chloride (salt) is a monad metal.
APOCALYPSE SURVIVAL KITS

Basic Disaster Supplies Kit
To assemble your kit, store items in airtight plastic bags and put your entire disaster supplies kit in one or two easy-to-carry containers such as plastic bins or a duffel bag.

A basic emergency supply kit could include the following recommended items:
- Water—one gallon of water per person per day for at least three days, for drinking and sanitation
- Food—at least a three-day supply of non-perishable food
- Battery-powered or hand crank radio and a NOAA Weather Radio with tone alert
- Flashlight
- First aid kit
- Extra batteries
- Whistle to signal for help
- Dust mask to help filter contaminated air and plastic sheeting and duct tape to shelter-in-place
- Moist towelettes, garbage bags and plastic ties for personal sanitation
- Wrench or pliers to turn off utilities
- Manual can opener for food
- Local maps
- Cell phone with chargers and a backup battery
- Prescription medications
- Non-prescription medications such as pain relievers, anti-diarrhea medication, antacids or laxatives
- Glasses and contact lens solution
- Infant formula, bottles, diapers, wipes, diaper rash cream
- Pet food and extra water for your pet
- Cash or traveler’s checks
- Important family documents such as copies of insurance policies, identification and bank account records saved electronically or in a waterproof, portable container
- Sleeping bag or warm blanket for each person
- Complete change of clothing appropriate for your climate and sturdy shoes
- Household chlorine bleach and medicine dropper to disinfect water
- Fire extinguisher
- Matches in a waterproof container
- Feminine supplies and personal hygiene items
- Mess kits, paper cups, plates, paper towels and plastic utensils
- Paper and pencil
- Books, games, puzzles or other activities for children

LEAN IN BY SHERYL SANDBERG

Based on a 2010 Ted Talk, Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg urges women to take risks and seek new challenges, to find work that they love, and to remain passionately engaged with it at the highest levels throughout their lives. She suggests that women can have it all.
THINGS THAT ARE ROUND

From the Director

NOTES:

Theatre has always been concerned with creation of worlds and the manipulation of truth. In 1961 Samuel Beckett said, “to find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now.” At this moment the notions of truth and reality are urgent, vital, and political, which makes this task even more difficult. In this piece we see the rapid-fire construction of dozens of worlds. Each word initiates a game, a shift, an opus. Nina and Tetherly both comprise and create these worlds in their entirety.

Language can exemplify beauty, but it can also violate, manipulate, and harm. In this piece, as in our world, language is used to shift reality. Because of the inherent fluidity of language and human understanding, these shifts can go unnoticed until they accumulate. Change isn’t innately good or bad, obviously, but change that we fail to recognize can be catastrophic.

BIO:

Lola B. Pierson (Director) is a Baltimore-based playwright and director, and is delighted to be making her Rep Stage debut. She has a BA from Bard College where she double majored in Human Rights and Playwriting, and an MFA in Theatre from Towson University. As the co-founding artistic director of The Acme Corporation she makes original work and re-imagines classics. She is the winner of five Baltimore City Paper “Best of Baltimore” awards and was a recipient of the Greater Baltimore Cultural Alliance’s “Ruby Award” for Literary Arts. Most recently, her original play Follow No Strangers To The Fun Places, which she wrote and co-directed, was awarded “Best Play of 2018” by Baltimore Magazine. Other words she has used to describe her work in bios include: presence, explore, dynamic, and representation.
Design

LIGHTING RESEARCH By Sarah Tundermann
Design

SET DESIGN, By Daniel Ettinger
COSTUME DESIGN, By Heather Jackson

TETHERLY

NINA
Cast

Beth Hylton*
(TETHERLY)

Thais Menendez**
(NINA)

* AEA Member  ** EMC

Creative Team

** Director:** Lola B. Pierson

**Scenic Designer:** Daniel Ettinger

**Costume Designer:** Heather C. Jackson

**Lighting Designer:** Sarah Tundermann

**Sound Designer:** Sarah O’Halloran

**Properties Designers:** Amy Kellett

**Stage Manager:** Julie DeBakey Smith

**Assistant Stage Manager:** Amanda Reandeau

14. Things that are Round AUDIENCE GUIDE
Questions for Discussion

1. Which of the stories and details Nina and Tetherley share do you think are factual and which imagined? What is your evidence for your opinion?

2. Have you ever made up imaginary people or situations with others? How old were you? Why did you do it?

3. How would you design transitions based on this stage direction: “Time jumps. Also, the living room shifts a bit” when you are working with a unit set and no technology?

Theater Etiquette

Attending the theater will be a positive experience for everyone if you observe a few simple courtesies:

- Turn off and put away all electronic devices prior to entering the theater.
- Taking photographs and video recording in the theater is prohibited.
- Do not place your feet on the seat in front of you.
- The actors onstage can see and hear the audience just as well as the audience can see and hear them. Please refrain from talking or moving around during the performance as it can be distracting to the actors, as well as to other audience members.
- Feel free to respond to the action of the play through appropriate laughter and applause. The actors enjoy this type of communication from the audience!
- Have fun! Attending theater should be an enjoyable experience.