

# A CONVERSATION WITH PLAYWRIGHT KATE HAMILL

By Tom Miller

**TM: What are some things you are enjoying (or learning to cope with) during quarantine?**

**KH:** 1. I am cooking like mad. I find the step-by-step, hands-on process really grounding.

2. I'm reading a lot of historical fiction and non-fiction. Nothing puts even these very troubled times in perspective like reading about hard times in the past, and the fundamental resilience of humanity. I'm midway through Hilary Mantel's "*The Mirror and the Light*."

3. Like many playwrights, I'm a compulsive researcher – so I read the news constantly. This is theoretically helpful for coping but probably not great for my overall anxiety levels.

4. I'm doing a LOT of thinking about what I want to write next. This is a time of reflection and introspection. I don't think we will be returning to "normalcy" ever again – if the world has changed, it's important to think about what we want this new world to look like.

**TM: Have you discovered anything new?**

**KH:** I'm re-learning how to drive! Oh, also – I gave my husband a haircut – ultimate relationship test – and learned I wasn't bad at it, actually! Phew.

Kate Hamill

**TM: McCarter announced that your new play, inspired by Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, would be part of the 20/21 season. Why did you decide to explore this story?**

**KH:** I was very interested in writing a piece about the misogyny and fear of the "other" baked into American government, and the violence used to enforce 'morality.' I woke up the morning after the 2016 election wanting to write this play.

I'm a radical adaptor – I believe that every adaptation should stand on its own as a piece of theater, not as a copy-and-paste imitation of the novel. It's important that we keep pushing the form; that we make sure the work speaks to us, today. This play is loosely inspired by Hawthorne's novel; it's an exploration. I wanted to reckon with the original sin of America's birth and examine how we, as individuals and a society, can find redemption when we've done something wrong.

This play speaks about sin as a form of "sickness" – that's very much what the Puritans believed, that moral failings could infect a whole society. I wrote this in 2017 when collective illness was a more abstract concept. I'll have to think about what that means to us, after what we've been through with COVID-19. The play is first and foremost about healing and redemption – how we heal ourselves, and how we heal collectively. I think that will be needed. McCarter does some of the richest, most interesting work out there – they are not afraid of asking big questions – and "how do we heal?" is now a bigger question than it ever was.



Photo by Ashley Garrett



Kate Hamill playing Becky Sharp in *Vanity Fair*. Photo by Russ Rowland



Kate Hamill playing Lizzy Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* at Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival

## ABOUT KATE HAMILL

Kate Hamill is an actor/playwright. Wall Street Journal's Playwright of the Year, 2017. Her work includes her play *Pride & Prejudice* (in which she originated role of Lizzy; Nominee, Off-B'way Alliance Award). Other plays include *Sense & Sensibility* (originated role of Marianne. Winner, Off-B'way Alliance Award; Nominee, Drama League Award); *Vanity Fair* at the Pearl (in which she originated role of Becky Sharp; Nominee, Off-B'way Alliance Award), *Mansfield Park* at Northlight (originated role of Mary Crawford). Additional acting: *Cyrano* (Amphibian Stage; "Outstanding Performance by An Actress" - DFW Critics' Forum), *The Seagull* (Bedlam) *Dreams of... Marsupial Girl* (PearlDamour), *General from America* (HVSF), *Noises Off* (Syracuse Stage). Her plays have been produced off-Broadway, at A.R.T., OSF, Guthrie, Seattle Rep, Dallas Theater Center, PlayMaker's, Folger, Arvada Center, Trinity Rep, Pittsburgh Public, Dorset Theatre Festival & others; Shakespeare Theatre of DC, Dallas Theater Center, Portland Center Stage, Kansas City Rep, A.C.T., & more. She is developing new adaptations of *The Odyssey*, and a revamped version of *A Christmas Carol* titled "Scrooge for Senate", and several original plays (*Prostitute Play*, *In the Mines* [with The Bengsons], *The Piper*). Kate was one of the top 10 most-produced playwrights in 2017-2018, and among the top 5 most-produced playwrights nationwide in 2018-2019.

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