

SUBWAYS AND SUBTEXTS :

CONNECTING TRAINS OF THOUGHT FOR THE THEATER IN ENGLAND

TRIP of December 27, 2004-January 9, 2005

By Kevin Cryderman

In this theatre journal, rather than doing a play-by-play analysis at the time on the trip, I retrospectively move across plays in my discussion of various themes and topics that I saw as points of connection. Therefore, most of the twenty-one productions I saw appear within multiple sections to allow for various links during my casual conversations with myself. As with most journals, these are fragmentary, inelegant and ineloquent reflections rather than fully-worked-out argumentative essays. Nevertheless, I do bring in quotations from the playscripts or background information in relation to both the topics of my critical responses to the plays and my experiences in London, namely: storytelling; intersecting space-time; the narrativization of history; race, nation, roots, gender, sexuality and their representation; cinematic techniques and projection; adaptation and re-writing; re-staging Shakespeare; language and audience interpellation; music and dance; and props and lighting.

As I begin writing this journal on my computer, I am drinking tea and dipping a madeleine in it (Truth be told, it's a gingerbread cookie with M&Ms on top, and this introduction was written after the journal.) as I think about the question of roots and heritage—a topic suggested by both my trip and some of the plays. Along with Germany and the Ukraine, part of my own heritage and familial roots lie in Ireland and Britain. The French and the English founded my own home country of Canada, officially at least,

so I suppose this trip is a return to The Mother Land. Many describe the town I come from, Victoria (the capital of the province of British Columbia) as a ‘miniature London,’ named after Queen Victoria. Victoria is a tourist, education and government town, with Wax Museums, places for high tea, a world famous flower garden (Butchart Gardens), Shakespeare festivals, double-decker buses, and various echoes of Empire. We even have a pub called the Bengal Lounge that mimics the feel of colonial India, where one can sip cranberry martinis next to a large hyperreal Bengal tiger with Indian sitar music playing the background. My theatre trip in England, however, began from my current city of residence, Rochester New York, where I am a Ph.D. student in English at the University of Rochester. I flew out of Rochester at 6:11 a.m. on January 27th and made a connecting flight ‘back in time’ one hour and moving West—O’Hare International airport in Chicago. I waited in the airport for two hours, mainly occupied by reading *Swann’s Way*, the first volume of Marcel Proust’s 4,000 page novel *A La recherche du temps perdu*, a title sometime translated as *In Search of Lost Time*. I was, however, distracted continually by the conversations and moving masses of people around me. The narration of the novel moves from first person, a narrator named Marcel, to third person, a seemingly omniscient narrator, and back again through constellations of metaphors and webs of associative memory made present to the mind. The gap between internal memory and external writing in *Swan’s Way* creates the space of the creative imagination, and the constant transformational flow of the novel explodes the banal into something enjoyable at the level of the senses—a journey of time-spaces constantly intersecting and moving into each other.

After my own journey on the plane and through various security gates, when I first emerged from the labyrinthine tunnels of London's underground network at the Russell Square tub stop, I ended up turning left rather than going forward. This minor mistake sent me walking around the neighborhoods and lost in the rain in the Mother Land. As a naïve undergraduate, I had been to London in 2000 for Chaucer and Joyce conferences, but I was not very familiar with this part of the city. Street after street, I cursed the navigation gods and my own lack of spatial orientation skills. Weighed down by my baggage, I trudged along with weary steps, cursing my own silliness for having forgotten to pick up one of Dr. Peck's maps before I left. I was a Boy Scout as a boy, but the motto 'Be Prepared' had seemed to slip my mind this time. Nevertheless, I asked for directions to the Harlingford Hotel from several other hotels in the area, but none of them had heard of it. This little escapade propelled me to begin thinking about space and orientation in relation to both the City of London—its streets, museums and art galleries—as well as the question of how I would orient myself in relation to the plays I was about to see.

On my journey towards the hotel, I obtained a map that helped me move in the vague direction of Cartwright Gardens. However, the map became soaking wet in the wind and rain as my umbrella blew open in the wrong direction and broke, turned inside out. This was around 1 p.m. in the morning, an hour after I had left the tube stop at Russell Square. I was lost once again until I spotted a nice young Anglo-Indian gentlemen just walking down the steps of his mother's house saying goodbye. I politely asked him where I could find Cartwright Gardens. Noticing I looked rather bedraggled and sopping wet, in the 'spirit of universal brotherhood and Christmas New Year's and

all that,' as he put it, and upon the urging of his mother, he kindly offered me a ride to the hotel. I initially tried to open the right side door but he reminded me that the passenger side was on the left. After a short pleasant trip hurtling through windy London streets, we arrived at the Harlingford Hotel. I was extremely grateful and, as I shook the hands of this nameless man (I forgot to ask his name and properly introduce myself) to say thanks and goodbye, I began to reflect upon the ways in which I would narrate this short episode of my life to others—how this experience of confusion and escape would be turned into a good story.

Storytelling, Imagination, and Escape

Resonant with my little anecdote, several of the plays we saw engaged in the idea of salvation or escape through storytelling, such as *Anne of Green Gables*, *Festen* and *His Dark Materials*. In *Anne of Green Gables*, Emma Reeves adds a frame story to Lucy Maud Montgomery's 1906 novel. Katie Maurice, a flesh and blood version of Anne's mirror friend from the novel, is a modern England schoolgirl of Eastern-European heritage—an immigrant harassed by fellow classmates who finds solace in the eastern Canadian imaginative world of the novel. Katie thus, like Anne, becomes caught up in reveries and daydreams and finds an escape in storytelling and imagination. Director Andrew Loudon stages the play in a minimal picture-book style set, consisting of a simple school room, some artificial lawn and the house of Anne's adoptive parents, Matthew Cuthbert (played David Baron) and Marilla Cuthbert (Jenny Lee). Like the schoolroom, the house seems like a full-sized version of a child's dollhouse. The use of a rolling chalkboard for scene changes drawn in faux-chalk added to the child-like

ambiance. As Katie reads the book in the schoolroom for a sympathetic janitor who likewise becomes engrossed in Anne Shirley's story, the novel becomes acted out for Katie in her imagination as she reads—made present to the mind and the spectators of the play.

Instead of a Brechtian alienation effect, though, the childlike unreality of the set potentially elicits an imaginative response of identification from the audience akin to Katie's reading and storytelling in relation to Anne Shirley. For instance, the actors move desks and sit upon them for a horse-drawn carriage when Anne first comes to Avonlea in Prince Edward Island and narrates her response to the local trees and scenes of nature. The audience is asked to imagine the scene along with Katie, who stands-in as an embodiment of the spectator-reader upon the stage. As Katie reads the story to the janitor, they both imagine Anne imagining the story of Lancelot and Elaine with her friends. Anne and her friends act out the story of Lancelot and Elaine in front of us, including the desks acting as the boat upon which Elaine's deceased body rests. This version contrasts with other times, when actors in costume act out the imagined scene on the stage before the audience. The same actress (Anjali Jay) plays both Katie Maurice and Elaine, implying that the scene is Katie imagining Anne imagine the scene with Katie in the lead role. At the same time, the actor who plays Gilbert Blythe (Matt Canavan) also plays Lancelot. Thus, the play stages for the audience in the 'here and now' many layers of frames, storytelling and imagination. The story of Anne becomes a kind of escape through imagination for Katie and a minor form of salvation, since Anne succeeded in the end even though she was teased for her red hair and originally came from an orphanage. Indeed, *Anne of Green Gables* engages in an exploration of the

formation of a new form of family unit that initially seems dysfunctional—namely the Cuthberts had been expecting a boy to help them with farmwork that had grown difficult for them in their senior years. Nevertheless the newly-formed family unit, despite the trials and tribulations, eventually comes to be a means of minor salvation for both Anne and the Cuthberts.

In *Festen*, Christian's storytelling becomes a means of salvation and a move towards at least a partial escape from the torment of his sister's suicide and their shared abuse by their father, Helge. At his father's birthday party in the family-owned inn, Christian's naked truth-telling in the story of 'father takes a bath' leads to a shocking revelation of childhood sexual abuse that only becomes accepted by the family near the end of the play, when the other sister, Helene, reads out Linda's suicide note, which mentions "Dad has started to take me again. In my dreams anyway" (Act III, scene ii). While the expulsion of the father at the end of the play does not rid the family of the plague of abuse and the aftermath of the trauma, there is nevertheless a gesture towards equilibrium as Christian asks Pia to come live with him in Paris. Through a corroboration with the suicide note, Christian's persistent speeches that narrate stories of abuse ignored by his mother, Else, generate a form of release and escape for the ghost of Linda. As Dr. Peck posited in the seminar, what seems like an incredibly dysfunctional family, such as the fights and confrontations, is rather functional in that ultimately the value of the family's survival, even at the expense of the father's expulsion, overrides each character's personal gain. Storytelling in *Festen* thus acts as truth-telling therapy that confronts and works through suppressed trauma within the family unit.

In *His Dark Materials*, storytelling also becomes a means of salvation and quite literal escape for ghosts and for Will and Lyra. When Will and Lyra travel to the Land of the Dead, they strike a bargain with the Harpies in order to return to the Land of the Living. When Lyra tells a false story, the harpy No-Name flies at her, but truthful storytelling nourishes No-Name and the other Harpies because they “didn’t know that there was anything in the world but lies and wickedness” (Part II Act ii). In return for showing Lyra, Will and the ghosts in the Land of the Dead the way “out of this place into the open air,” Lyra and Will promise the harpies the “right to lead every ghost who arrives, all the way through the Land of the Dead, from the landing post to the world outside” (II ii). Thus, the Land of the Dead becomes not an eternal torment but a kind of holding tank for new ghosts until they tell the harpies the truth—a return to the world of the living to dissolve into the “wind and the trees and the earth and all living things” once they have told the truth of their own lives through storytelling. Storytelling becomes a means of both self-understanding and freedom that, for Will and Lyra, looks forward to when they will be re-united.

In the play’s structure, through retrospective storytelling acted out in the ‘here and now,’ spectators come to learn how Will and Lyra arrived upon the bench, next to each other yet not able to interact directly. The six hour play opens and closes with the scene on the park bench in two different realities, and Will and Lyra’s ‘conversation’ becomes the springboard for all of the action spectators see during the play. Memory and storytelling are presented before us in the here and now even though Will and Lyra are narrating all of the events retrospectively. At the close of the play, “*two clocks are heard striking*”—an allusion to fact that time, in some sense, is synchronized between worlds, a

split shown by the splitting of the tree and bench, yet the space is both different and the same. The intersection of space-times without contact occurs in the number of plays that we saw in London, though each play uses this device for different connections between the use of space on the stage and various themes running through the productions.

Intersecting zones of Space-Time

In *His Dark Materials*' Land of the Dead, souls from all of the parallel universes come together in one space—a dynamic acted out in a way that uses the space of the audience seats. 'Ghosts' of children from multiple universes talk to actors on the stage as they climb down from parts of the theatre and make their way towards them. In contrast, the structure of the 'conversation' between Will and Lyra in Oxford's Botanical Gardens, only heard in its fullness by the audience, is an overlapping space-time where, poignantly, their two parallel universes do not quite meet. Will and Lyra cross-over into each others' worlds and cannot be together physically at the end of the play because, as Will reminds Lyra of what his father said: "We can only survive in the world we're born in" (II ii). There is thus a tragic unrequited quality to Will and Lyra's burgeoning love and desire, though as the two agree to 'meet' in the gardens every Midsummer Night at midnight, they forge a bond across time and space as the two accept a life philosophy where "you must be where you are" and "where you are is the place that matters most of all" because "it's the only place where you can make. . .where you can build. . .where you can share. . .what you've been looking for all along. . .The Republic of Heaven" (II ii).

This overlapping dialogue between Will and Lyra connects to other intersections of time and space in plays we saw in London, such as *Anne of Green Gables*, *Grand Hotel*, *Festen*, *Sweeney Todd* and *The History Boys*. In *Anne of Green Gables*, the childlike set does not only elicit an imaginative response to the picture-book setting, but the lack of walls or borders in the set generates an overlap of various time-spaces, such as the classroom set, which doubles as both the present moment of Katie's engagement with the story and the schoolroom in Avonlea. At several points, Katie walks around and through the set, unseen by the characters though standing behind the mirror as Anne looks at herself in the Cuthbert home. The Donmar Warehouse's production of *Grand Hotel*, directed by Michael Grandage, stages an even more radical juxtaposition of space-times, as the set is for the most part a bare stage that stands-in for any room in the hotel. The opening scenes establish the narrative threads as characters move upon the stage in various intersections of their rooms and dialogues, which, akin to the Botanical Gardens scenes in *His Dark Materials*, can only be apprehended by the audience. The minimalistic set and its lack of physical walls downplays the solidity and semi-permanence of the hotel's structure in favor of the transitory stories and characters passing through it.

The hotel is not a site of permanent residence but a meeting place that brings into relation and throws into flux various time-spaces, stories, dreams, social classes and statuses where money has become the international social currency of the day. The Baron Felix Von Gaigern has only title, yet the beautiful stenographer Flaemmchen entertains hints of potential romance with him partially because he seems to be able to further her dreams of being a famous Hollywood actress. However, the old aristocratic

order has broken down. Certain men such as the Baron only have a residual social status, exemplified by Kringlein's instant admiration of him, but no place within the capitalist regime of the *nouveau riche*. Paradoxically, he is a thief but no one would suspect him of this due to his status, which they assume comes with money. At the same time, the *nouveau riche* bourgeois classes do not seem to be faring any better. The business tycoon, Herman Preysing (Martyn Ellis) has respect because many see him as wealthy and powerful, but he, too, is scrambling to make merger deals because his company is in jeopardy. Herman offers Flaemmchen a position as a traveling typist who will also be 'nice' to him; she initially agrees solely for economic reasons to help her dreams of 'making it' in Hollywood.

Hollywood forms part of the background of the musical—a roulette wheel-type social circle where dreams of both money and status seem to be fulfilled and dashed in the star system, which throws the certainties of social positioning into flux. The Baron is a gambler, embodying the element of chance and fortune's wheel within this new social order. The Grand Hotel epitomizes the ephemeral residence and lifestyle-of-appearances beyond one's means within this (dis)order. For example, a humble Jewish bookkeeper, Otto Kringlein (Daniel Evans) is a man of moderate wealth and no status or dashing appearances who can stay at the hotel because he is using up his life saving and can afford it, if only for a short while. By chance, he takes a stock tip from Von Gaigern and becomes wealthy overnight. This sudden wealth gives him the courage to ask Flaemmchen to travel with him at the end of the play. At the same time, the negative side of this sociopolitical flux emerges along with the transitory existence the hotel manifests. Kringlein is terminally ill and the crash that led to the Great Depression will soon occur

after the events of the play. The imminent presence of both death and misfortune haunt the celebrations of life in the hotel: *memento mori*. Nevertheless, there is hope in the birth of concierge's child and Flaemmchen, too, is pregnant—a motif that implies a cycle of birth and death, hope and disillusionment that the hotel represents.

The rooms of the inn within the performance of *Festen* at the Lyric Theatre also stage various intersections of space-times. The bed, for instance, rises onto the stage to act as the bed in multiple rooms as various dialogues between characters occur simultaneously on the stage in an overlapping manner that invites comparisons between the narrative threads and thematizes communication and non-communication. While there are no literal walls between each of the character-pairs on the stage, the audience imagines each of their separate time-spaces and walls—both literal and figurative. All across the backdrop of the set, there is a high brick wall, in front of which the action of play occurs. The imposing presence of this rough-hewn brick wall foregrounds both the absence of physical walls around the bed on stage and the figurative psychological blockages within and between characters. Thus, while the staging of the scene removes the physical walls between the character pairs, it simultaneously draws attention to metaphoric divides of obstacles to listening, hearing and genuine communication and connection between each of the characters within the walls of each room: Michael and Mette; Christian and Pia; Helene and Linda.

In one 'room,' around the one bed on stage, Michael screams at his wife Mette over his missing black shoes that she forgot to pack, yet the two do not hear the subtext of their conversation. As he is trying to recover from drunk and disorderly behavior on a previous occasion (including an affair with one of the chambermaids), which led him to

not be invited to the birthday party, Michael is highly concerned he will make a bad impression on his father: “I can’t go down to my dad in socks, can I?” (I iii). While he has been officially banned from the festivities, he nevertheless still values family, and he takes offense at Mette’s comment that “it’s your bloody fault we had to come up here to see your stupid family!” Michael asserts, in return, “It’s my dad’s birthday. It’s my father’s birthday! You listen—you don’t tell me anything!” (I iii). At the same time, Michael does not hear his wife’s pleas that she is left with the burden of domestic duties, such as packing, yet Michael still insists “everything goes perfectly” (I iii). While the three overlapping scenes around the bed thematize communication and non-communication, literally hearing but not really understanding each other, Michael and Mette resolve their dispute and connect with passionately hostile love-making.

Conversely, in another ‘room,’ Christian is unresponsive to both Pia’s sexual advances and her attempts to genuinely connect with him. Pia asks Christian to borrow his bath, though the implication is that she is entering into his personal space in order to re-connect with her former lover. Christian sits stationary on the bed while Pia walks around him—a reversal of her self-imagination of a static life and imagination of Christian and the other siblings as more physically and socially mobile. For instance, Pia explains to Christian that she has remained at the inn after having missed various opportunities to ‘move on’ to larger centers such as Copenhagen (after Bettina H. move in with her love interest instead): “So I stayed here. It’s been all right. I went to the park yesterday. I’ve been baking quite a lot. I’m making the pudding tonight. You’re not listening to me” (I iii). Christian appears not to listen to Pia, yet he literally hears that she’s “making the pudding tonight.” Nevertheless, Christian fails to engage with the

subtext of her self-narrativization of her somewhat hollow, lonely and alienated life after failed romances and missed opportunities—a situation she (wrongly) imagines is unlike Christian's: "I'm the last one who's still here. You're all jet-setting off to Paris and everything. You're all important" (I iii).

Despite his outward signs of success, though, Christian is unable to 'move on' psychologically from the death of his sister, which triggered a re-visitation for him of their shared sexual abuse by their father and incest between Christian and Linda that emerged out of that situation. This trauma leaves Christian unable to connect with women in a meaningful way, even if it has taken his sister's suicide to force him to confront that fact. Getting ready for her bath in his room, Pia tries to seduce Christian by asking him to "undo" her bra; he is at odds for how to respond, asking "What do I do?" Literally, Pia's response is practical, "unhook the clasp," yet metaphorically Christian's question involves how he can deal with or "undo" the legacy of his childhood abuse and sister's suicide—both of which have come to bind him psychologically so he "can't even be bothered to make love" to her (I iii). The sexual enticement of her question, "What do you think? I've still got a great arse" become more pronounced and apparent to the audience with the attractiveness of the actress, Ruth Millar. Spectators inhabit a position in relation to the overlapping time-spaces of the bed scene and their possible sexual attraction for the lingerie-clad Pia (and/or Ruth Millar), depending upon sexual orientation.

Indeed, the scene plays upon this very question of orientation, space and sexuality. As Pia asks "where are you?," this question imbricates the audience within this dynamic as they are passive observers, either desiring or not desiring Pia, much like

Christian. The stage is both a literal and a psychological space where Christian is both estranged from and ultimately returns to himself. Christian's apparent lack desire for Pia during the 'bed scene' juxtaposes the passionately out-of-control, boisterous and highly visible sexual activities of Michael and Mette as they resolve their dispute. Pia, in fact, wonders aloud what is wrong with Christian, who used to be the "out-of-control one—you always got in fights. Now it's Michael. What happened, Christian?" (I iii). Christian's rediscovery of his 'fighting spirit' will take central stage in his confrontation with his father later in climactic scenes of the play. This question of "what happened" also takes on multiple resonances within the play—what happened to Christian in his adulthood that has made him lose his out-of-control passion for Pia and fighting spirit; what happened in Christian and Linda's childhood; and what happened around Linda's suicide.

In the third 'room' acted out around the bed on stage, with the help of Lars, the concierge who shows her to the room, Helene plays a hotter/colder game, where Linda had drawn markings-as-clues around the room. Helene eventually finds her sister's suicide note. The overlapping time-spaces of the 'bed scene' implies that another ghost-space blurs the past and present and co-habits with the current occupants of the inn. Within the whole bed scene, the sound of running water weaves into the background of the performance around the bed, along with the sound of children's laughter—both of which are not in the script. The bath, along with the bed forms a motif where various narrative threads of these three spatiotemporal realities connect. Linda's suicide looms over the birthday party and Helene's occupation of the room in which her sister died creates yet another overlapping time-space around the one bed upon the stage that not only blurs the line between rooms but also between the living and the dead. Here,

between Linda and Helene there is another exploration of communication and eventual acknowledgment of its import. Helene finds the note and reads it, saying to Lars that “It doesn’t say anything” (I iii). Yet, she remarks to Lars that “There have always been ghosts in this house” and decides to stay in the room, even though it is haunted by the presence of her sister’s death. At the same time, though, she does not want to confront the implications of meaning of what the suicide note says until she reads it aloud at the party, prompted by Christian.

The New Ambassador’s production of Stephen Sondheim’s *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, directed by John Doyle, also blurs the line between the living and the dead as well as between actors and musical accompaniment. Because Sweeney is lowered into and emerges out of a coffin during the first song, “The Ballad of Sweeney Todd,” there is an implication that all onstage are ghosts. A limited set of actors perform not only multiple roles in the production but also play the musical instruments. The orchestra ‘pit’ shifts to onstage, much as how the actions of the play transport the gutter of historical gossip to the apotheosis of late twentieth-century musical theatre. For instance, after Sweeney Todd kills various characters, such as the Judge (Colin Wakefield) or Mrs. Lovett (Karen Mann), those actors return to the musical band scattered around the stage. Along with the mixture of actors and musicians onstage, the overlapping space-times of the story came into view upon the single set and required an imaginative leap by the audience to translate to the literal settings. The elicitation of an imaginative leap was not the childlike storytelling of *Anne of Green Gables*, however, but the horrific narrativization of history within these overlapping spatiotemporal realities. Even to a greater extent, the single plank board set of *Sweeney Todd* is suggestive of

many ‘real life’ environments—such as a bakery, a ship, an attic barbershop or a mental asylum—and allows for these various spaces to come into fluid relationships with each other. Rather than a simulacrum of a historical environment, like the dugout in *Journey’s End*, *Sweeney Todd*’s set implies that the space of the performance is one of memory, psychology and the imagination of history based on scant details, much like the story of Sweeney Todd himself. The eighteenth-century-style convex mirror hung at the back of the set, for instance, implies that the spectatorship of history is a distorted vision of oneself.

Especially as directed by Nicholas Hytner and staged at the Lyttelton Theatre, Alan Bennett’s *The History Boys* (2004) also uses intersections of time-spaces to link memory, history and human psychology. The movable walls of the set imply a certain plasticity of memory as well as compartmentalization that fails in the human mind. As Irwin talks about Posner to Mrs. Lintott in the Staff Room, for example, Posner appears alongside Irwin—an externalization of his memory on stage and a performance of the blurring of time-spaces within the human mind:

Irwin Posner came to see me yesterday. He has a problem.

Mrs. Lintott No nickname, but at least you get their problems. I seldom do.

Posner Sir, I think I may be a homosexual.

Irwin Posner, I wanted to say, you are not yet in a position to be anything.

Mrs. Lintott You’re young, of course. I never had that advantage.

Posner I love Dakin.

Irwin Does Dakin know?

Posner Yes. He doesn't think it's surprising. Though Dakin likes girls basically.

Irwin I sympathised, though not so much as to suggest that I might be in the same boat.

Mrs. Lintott With Dakin?

Irwin With anybody.

There is thus not only the uncertainty of Irwin's sexual orientation brought to light via his discussion of Posner, but an overlapping set of conversations involving Posner, Dakin and Irwin as well as Lintott's envy of Irwin's connection with the students. The performance stages questions of 'sympathy' as the characters inhabit the same physical space on stage in a way that mimics the blending of personal, psychological space with that of the social world to a point where the two are indistinguishable at times.

The staging also highlight the manner in which memory engages in compartmentalization that is ultimately futile. In the seminar after we saw the play, Dr. Peck drew upon the staging of these intersecting temporal realities. He suggested that the set embodies the angularity and compartmentalization of synapses, memory and thought as well as the intersections involved in the functioning of the brain: the labyrinth of history and the brain played upon the stage. Many of the video inserts doubled this labyrinth motif via attention to multiple hallways, which along with the play's non-chronological architecture implies the convoluted 'building' of memory. In conjunction with the set, this hallway motif recalls Giordano Bruno's *method of loci* mnemonic technique, where one constructs an imaginary building in the mind and places the desired objects and ideas of memory within its rooms. Irwin positions historical commemoration as a form of forgetting, anti-memory and convoluted denial of responsibility for England

in the war : “We still don’t like to admit the war was even partly our fault because so many of our people died. A photograph on every mantelpiece. And this mourning has veiled the truth. It’s not so much lest we forget, as lest we remember” (I).

Mourning and commemoration become ways to gain distance from historical events, reducing the dead to a manageable set of images that elides political complicity or an et cetera—“mere verbal abbreviation,” as Hector remarks. While Posner’s uncle strikes him for commenting during a visit home that “the Holocaust was a historical fact like other historical facts,” the examiners later praise Posner for attaining the critical distance of the historian—his “sense of detachment,” which is the “foundation of writing history” (II). As Irwin tells the boys, “this is history. Distance yourselves. Our perspective on the past alters” and “one of the historian’s job is to anticipate what our perspective of that period [of the recent past] will be. . .even on the Holocaust” (II). Thus, metaphors of space collapse into formulations of historical distance, but the intersecting zones of time-spaces in the play suggests that the past, both personal and collective history, continuously infiltrates understandings of the ‘here and now’ and the impossible purity of the present.

In conjunction with comments made by Dr. Peck in the seminar on *Sleeping Beauty*, my visit to Warwick castle helped me to reflect on issues of history in relation to storytelling, class, ideology and the organization of space with the plays. In both *Fix-Up* and *Sleeping Beauty*, for instance, there were three levels of staging. In *Fix-Up*, the basement, the main floor and the attic suggested motifs of social mobility. Kwesi’s capitalist enterprises, which will eventually take over the main floor’s attention to heritage and tradition, were planned in the attic while the main drama occurred on the

main stage. Both ascending the tall bookshelves on the main floor and climbing the stairs to the attic imply the motif of ‘racial uplift’ or ‘social progress.’ However, the main floor’s intellectual and activist traditions are not enough. The hair products business is what will be more popular than the bookstore and will take over the main floor. The basement served as a holding place for newly-arrived and less popular books, it seemed—perhaps an indication of that which has not yet arrived or has disappeared from the public’s awareness. The levels in *Sleeping Beauty* more closely aligned with class, as the castle in the sky embodied the aristocratic sphere while the main stage was the site for the main ‘bourgeois’ or ‘domestic’ action of the play, the ‘nuclear family unit,’ and the basement was the underworld, the place of slaves, rose bush people and earthiness. The basement was also the kitchen and where the slaughtering of substitute sacrifices for the Ogre mother instead of Beauty’s children took place: a goat, a donkey, a cat, and so forth. The chaotic mixture of people from various ‘levels’ of society is a nod to ‘upstairs-downstairs’ comedies of the British tradition—perfected in Robert Altman’s film *Gosford Park*. The basement in *Sleeping Beauty* also resonates with the underground kitchen in *Festen*, which is literally where the cooks work but also represents lower levels of the psyche perhaps, where Christian must go to unearth his hidden traumas and muster the courage, epitomized by his chef friend Kim, to continue to challenge his father with the truth of their shared personal histories. Because the same young actress played Linda and Mette’s little girl, the scene where she assists the cook in bringing up dishes of food for the table implies a certain movement from the depths of repressed memory and trauma to the space of confrontation and storytelling—the place of the banquet table.

Warwick castle also suggested certain relationships between intersecting time-spaces and the performance of history. While billed as a medieval castle, the tour consultant I spoke with noted that the castle contains many re-workings and additions over the centuries, partially due to a fire that occurred and mainly to accord with the tastes of the series of owners. One main room was built and furnished in the eighteenth century and remains that way, while others were re-modeled in the Victorian era and up to the present day. The castle is thus an intersection of various preserved times-spaces and acts as a kind of living museum as costumed actors and wax human models inhabit the halls and rooms. The wax dolls are frozen in time in a pose, dressed in Medieval and Renaissance-style outfits amidst various simulacra of ‘historically accurate scenes’ of daily life during these time periods in the castle. These scenes also contain a narrator who gives information about the castle and sound effects of people talking and working. A visit to the castle is thus a kind of spectatorship of simulated history, where wax models of historical actors exist in chilly detail. One tower also contains ‘spooky’ sound effects and bills itself as the ‘ghost tower.’ My visit to the castle resonated with the museumification of history in Stratford-upon-Avon as well, particularly Shakespeare’s childhood home, his school and grave.

At the Barbican before I saw *Sleeping Beauty*, I visited the Museum of London, which grouped various spaces together under time periods. While I focused mainly on the Medieval and Renaissance displays up until the Great Fire of 1666 display, the museum as a whole later resonated with my visit to Stratford and the propagation of history as a set of artifacts, props, aesthetics, and repertoire of cultural works. The style of buildings in the town of Stratford-upon-Avon is an attempt to preserve the aura of the

Renaissance, even though very few of the buildings actually date from the period. Nevertheless, like Warwick castle, they bring to mind the various ways in which spectators of plays, towns and museums become positioned within various models of truth and representation.

The Narrativization of History

The question of truth in history within *The History Boys* links to plays such as *Sweeney Todd* and *Fix-Up*. The three plays center around investigations of the ways in which history becomes a narrative through various modes of historiography and the staging of history as a performance. The debated historical veracity of *Sweeney Todd* links to a general thread in the plays we saw on the London trip—that of history and its narrativization through various modes. The Sondheim musical version of *Sweeney Todd* is based upon a play version by Christopher Bond. Bond calls the story “pure fiction,” yet research by people such as British author Peter Haining contends that the demon barber of Fleet Street is not merely an urban legend but historical fact. If Haining is correct, *Sweeney Todd* does reflect a certain amount of historicity, namely that there was a mad barber who killed and robbed his clients, who ended up in meat pies (www.crimelibrary.com/serial9/sweeney). Yet, the very issue of historiography forming through various modes, including musical theatre, is what is at stake in many of these plays. What are the ways in which historical fact counts as ‘legitimate’ and ‘authentic’? In what ways does history become a form of storytelling in which ‘we’ recognize ourselves as both connected to and distant from ourselves?

In *Journey's End* (1929), staged at the Duke of York theatre and directed by David Grindley, spectators are situated as the 'fourth wall' of a war bunker in W.W.I. The set positions itself 'authentic' in its attention to minute, rough details—theatre as the 'presence of the past.' As we discussed in the seminar, the performance was a 'living monument' to those who died in the war. The curtain call, with the ghosts of soldiers standing in front of a wall of names (a scene not in the original play) produced a strong emotional response in many of the students, including myself. The static, claustrophobic quality of the stage design connotes the trap within which the soldiers existed—caught in circumstances beyond their control. The sounds of battle offstage also imply the spectatorship of history as always one-step-removed. In one scene, Raleigh and Osbourne prepare for the battle in which Osbourne will die and Raleigh will be traumatized by the naked horrors of war. The conversation between the two men distracts them from the situation they are about to face and dramatizes the presence of death always hovering around any person in history, just slightly off stage:

Osborne: Now we're off! Quick, let's talk about pigs! Black pigs or white pigs?

Raleigh: Black pigs. In the New Forest you find them quite wile.

Osborne: You know about the New Forest?

Raleigh: Rather! My home's down there. A little place called Allum Green, just outside Lyndhurst.

Osborne: I know Lyndhurst well.

Raleigh: It's rather nice down there.

Osborne: I like it more than any place I know.

Raleigh: I think I do too. Of course, it's different when you've always lived in a place.

Osborne: You like it in a different way.

Raleigh: Yes. Just behind our house there's a stream called the Highland; it runs for miles—right through the middle of the forest. Dennis and I followed it once as far as we could.

This conversation also circles around notions of place and the imagination of home within a confrontation of time between the present moment and the past. Raleigh reminisces of a time when he and Dennis (now Captain Stanhope) were schoolboys, before the massive trauma of war Stanhope has experienced and Raleigh is just about to experience in a few minutes. This scene is an example of how *Journey's End* pays attention to the details of day-to-day life in a dugout in the British trenches before St. Quentin for four days (the evening of Monday March 18, 1918 to Thursday March 21, 1918) rather than the large scale history of military campaigns and their grand 'theatre of operations.'

Along with questions of history and the details day-to-day human experience, Alan Bennett's *The History Boys* engages more explicitly than *Journey's End* does with modes of historiography and its theatrical dramatization. While Lockwood mentions a catchphrase by Mrs. Lintott, "This is history, not histrionics," Mr. Irwin encourages the dramatic and the anecdotal, even journalistic, mode of historiography. Irwin mentions, for instance, "At the time of the Reformation there were fourteen foreskins of Christ preserved, but it was thought that the church of St. John Lateran in Rome had the authentic prepuce" (Act I). Irwin's attention to history is as a kind of rhetorical performance. Scripps, for instance, mentions that "When Irwin became well known as an historian it was for finding his way to the wrong end of seesaws, settling on some hitherto

unquestioned assumption and then proving the opposite” (I). The boys learn from Irwin to question received wisdom; yet the question of historical veracity becomes less important perhaps than the effective use of the “gobbets” they learn from Hector to impress the examiners. According to Mrs. Lintott, history is “story-telling so much of it, which is what men do naturally. My ex, for instance. He told stories” (I). Lintott thus connects personal stories or lies told to others to the project of history as a form of narrativization, storytelling and fiction-making.

The performance of history is most evident in the mini ‘TV spots,’ which show Irwin moving about in ruins in his power wheelchair. As he moves in and about the ruins of the Rievaulx Abbey, one such TV spot shows Irwin attempting to draw viewers into a sympathetic connection with monastic life: “The monastic life only comes alive when contemplating its toilet arrangements” (II). Irwin claims that “what fires the popular imagination is stuff from the reredorter plopping twenty feet into the drains. God is dead. Shit lives” (II). This rhetorical performance of history through anecdote mimics not only early methodology of New Historicism, an imagined sympathetic relationship to the past through the accumulation of details and the contemplation of a historical anecdote, but also a journalistic mode. The performance of re-shoots and editing of the TV spot’s scene not only evokes the construction of history through television but also any historiography as careful re-shooting and editing to form a seemingly fluid historical narrative from disparate fragments and documents as other elements are left on the cutting room floor.

In the seminar, Dr. Peck listed various ways in which the play engages in history and historiography: as performance, allusion, testimony, examination, character and so

forth. The play also takes Irwin's journalistic mode and uses it as a means to engage with questions of how spectators of history imagine their relationship to the past through various narrative modes. When discussing tactics for the boys to take their examinations, Irwin comments that "truth is no more at issue in an examination than thirst at a wine-tasting or fashion at a striptease" (I). Dr. Peck also read Hector's groping of the boys on motorcycle rides as an emblem of 'reaching back' to touch the past while speeding forward, and this motif seems to embody an inversion of the angel of history, who always looks back but whose wings rush to the future. As the Headmaster comments on Hector's actions with the boys on the motorcycle, when "He, as it were, cradled them," there is a subtext of the historian's critical relationship to the past via historical distance: "To be fair I think it was more appreciative than investigatory but it is inexcusable nevertheless. Think of the *gulf of years*. And the speed! One knows that road well" (II, my emphasis). Geoff raised concerns that the humor involved in the fondling of the boys and an attention to the metaphoricity of the actions downplays too much the ethical and moral implications of fondling. However, the relationship to the past *is* a kind of ethical relationship that involves one's position as victor or victim in the narrative struggles to document and interpret history. This ethical conundrum plays out as Irwin discusses how one should approach the Holocaust with a certain critical distance, a distance made problematic by Posner's Jewish heritage. There is a tension in historiography between sympathetic identification, appreciation, and critical distance during an investigatory process that is "beyond lamentation" (II). Historiography is a sampling from the vast speed at which history moves and this 'reaching back' invokes a certain blindness.

I also think that Hector's name is not accidental, being the character in the *Iliad* whom Achilles defeats and whose corpse he parades around. There is the cliché about history being written by the victors as part of their spoils, but there is also the intimation that the culture of the defeated party nevertheless becomes incorporated into the dominant culture throughout history. One may argue that Irwin is the congratulated pedagogical victor who obtains the desired exam results for the boys. At the same time, however, Hector's teaching gives the boys the rounded perspectives that allow Irwin's methods to succeed, akin to the transmission of Greek culture and philosophy by the conquering Roman Empire. Timms notes to Irwin that "Mr. Hector's stuff's not meant for the exam, sir. It's to make us more rounded human beings" (I). The production of 'rounded human beings,' historical characters formed from bits of texts and images, is the method of many schools of historiography. While the Headmaster sees Hector's "old-fashioned faith in the redemptive power of words" and finds the results of his method "unpredictable and unquantifiable," Irwin remarks that Hector's teachings might prove useful during the upcoming examinations. Along with the connections between pedagogy and historiography, I also wondered if Hector's 'appreciative' relationship to the boys also invokes Greek philosophers and their catamite boys—simultaneously taught by the elder man and involved in a sexual relationship of some sort with him. Geoff disagreed with me in our frequent discussions in our room, citing the lack of allusions to this philosophical pedagogy in the play.

As Dr. Peck pointed out in the seminar, the 'history as allusion' model implies history as one way to organize our minds through memory and association, and the most successful boys are those who can navigate between or even synthesize the contrasting

teaching styles and allusions of Hector and Irwin. Hector has the students memorize poems by heart, for instance, and is not concerned with usefulness, while Irwin's style involves the collapse of information into a manageable rhetorical spin or 'cheat sheet' to obtain results on the exam. Irwin's perspective is wider than the Headmaster, however, who only looks at the bottom line of exam results. Mrs. Lintott seems to ask for some sort of reflection on the process or history-making and historiography, calling the Headmaster a "twat" (a slang for female genitalia) and questioning the validity of Hector's 'learning by heart' methods: "what's all this learning by heart for, except as some sort of insurance against the boys' ultimate failure?" (II). The three teachers and the Headmaster embody various perspectives on and about education, history and historiography in ways that bring in various voices. Lintott's voice self-consciously reflects on the question of marginalization, drawing a link between history and the play we are watching: "I have hitherto been allotted an inner voice, my role a patient and not unamused sufferance of the predilections and preoccupations of men" (II).

Gender, Race, Nation, Sexuality and Their Representation

This notion of marginalized and inner voices resonates between questions of gender and race that we saw in the plays reappearing at various points, such as *History Boys*, *Fix-Up*, *The Producers*, *Aladdin* and *Sleeping Beauty*. In relation to gender identity, Mrs. Lintott in *The History Boys*, the one female in the cast, calls attention to the masculine bias of historiography, particularly the marginalization of women's voices in a manner akin to the voices of slaves in *Fix-Up*, who finally speak in the slave narratives bought by Kiyi.

During the practice exam interviews, Dorothy forcefully yet playfully describes the role of women in history and historiography:

History's not such a frolic for women as it is for men. Why should it be? They never get round the conference table. In 1919, for instance, they just arranged the flowers then gracefully retired. History is a commentary on the continuing incapacities of men. What is history? History is women following behind with the bucket. And I'm not asking you to espouse this point of view but the occasional nod in its direction can do you no harm. (II)

Rudge defines history as “just one fucking thing after another” and this notion of historical ‘events’ plays up the seeming simplicity of history’s translation into historiography, yet this translation is precisely what is at stake here: the complex and historically-contingent ways in which the narrativization of history and identity takes place.

In Kwane Kwei-Armah’s *Fix Up* (2004), staged at the Cottesloe Theatre and directed by Angus Jackson, questions of vision, perspective and the marginalized voices of history become most explicit around the multi-volume book set of slave narratives that Brother Kiyi (Jeffrey Kisson) purchases. The set is a static bookshop for African and Black writing, filled with tall shelves that loom large over the actors: history as bibliography. When Alice (Nina Sosanya) reads the slave narratives aloud, a mimicry of her inner voice, the spotlight draws attention to her in a way that thematizes the issue of illuminating previous voices kept in the dark.

Brother Kiyi's bookshop also foregrounds the representation of race and the question of racial 'authenticity.' The loss of his bookstore to Kwesi's hair products shop at first seems like the replacement of an authentic Black identity with one more superficial and capitalistic. Yet, Kiyi's clothes and dreadlocks interrogate race as a culturally- and historically-produced repeated performance rather than an expression of an essential identity. In this light, the purchase of beauty products is no less a part of Black identity, such as the 'Black is beautiful' movement of the 1970s, than the intellectual and philosophical traditions surrounding Kiyi in his bookstore. Kiyi's cutting of the dreadlocks at the end of the play illustrates, on a personal level, a kind of purification ritual that cleanses him from the need to perform 'authentic black identity' as atonement for killing his white lover and the child of that union (Alice). The play does not reveal the ultimate motives for the murder, but Kiyi mentions the harassment and persecution the two lovers suffered as a result of their interracial relationship.

Kiyi's dreadlocks and the hair products to be sold by Kwesi link the various plays on the words roots and routes: hair roots, roots of identity and location, and various routes taken during slave-trading and immigration. Thus, the slave narratives bought by Kiyi link to an emergence of submerged voices into a form of textual representation and historiography. Carl's stuttering, history of drug abuse and street life embody other aspects of Black racial representation from which he emerges through Kiyi's help. Carl becomes another route Black identity can follow; the clarity of his voice while reading the slave narratives thus positions him as inhabiting a space of performing Black identity and its various journeys. Alice's presence, on one level, symbolizes a return and reminder of the interracial and mixed heritage of Black identity—how 'authenticity' and

‘purity’ are misguided concepts that do injustice to the entangled roots/routes by which modern Blackness has emerged as a category of identity.

The Producers, through parody, highlights the absurdity of holding the category of racial-national identity as ‘authentic.’ In “Springtime for Hitler,” for instance, the parade of dancing girls brings out various emblems of German national identity worn as hats: beer, wienerschnizel, Wagnerian viking horns, the Nazi eagle, a pretzel, and so forth. By staging this as farce, the song points to the hyper-nationalism of Nazi Germany and its attempts to ‘purify’ itself to gain an authentic link to the glorified past. Instead, the song reveals racial-national identity as an anxiously-repeated performance that produces the illusion of a substance or core. The costumes and performance of Nazism, in particular, become part of the source of comedy as the history of fascist Germany becomes replayed as farce. Hitler becomes a buffoon tyrant played by an actor who plays out various stereotypes of homosexuality, the ‘gayness’ sought by the director. This goal of ‘keeping it gay’ not only parodies stereotypes of homosexuality but fosters a kind of satiric cheerful resilience in the face of the legacy of the horrors of Nazi Germany. As Roger sings, “No matter what you do on the stage/ Keep it light, keep it bright, keep it gay!/ Whether it’s murder, mayhem or rage/ Don’t complain, it’s a pain/ Keep it gay!” Mel Brooks and Tom Meehan’s ‘cartoonization’ of fascism allows for a certain trumping of horror that does not simply commemorate history but works through historical trauma through comedy-as-therapy.

In my play viewing, I thought about the role of stereotypes in various theatrical productions as a source of comedy within certain frameworks, since much comedy depends on stereotypes. *Aladdin*, for example, stages Chinese identity in farcical terms

that may, on one level, seem like racist stereotypes—a kind of Chinese minstrel show as white actors plays out a Chinese racial identity on the stage. Yet, the pantomime points towards the performative nature of all identity categories, much like drag points to gender as a repeated, mostly-unconscious performance. There is no actor or ‘true’ and ‘essential’ identity underneath these masks. I talked with some of the other students after the show, some who found the pantomime racist. We speculated about how American audiences might react to an African-American version of this minstrel-show type of performances. We also wondered if American audiences would be more sensitive to the casting of a Black actor (Nicholas Beveney) to play the Ogre in *Sleeping Beauty*. Instead of racial insensitivity or political incorrectness, I wondered if *Aladdin* and *Sleeping Beauty* displayed a less-fraught relationship to race and sexual orientation than there is in the United States, where political correctness dominates and blatant homophobia, for instance, becomes discussed through the language of religion and constitutional amendments. In the seminar, Ruth Peck mentioned the tradition of ‘blind casting’ in British Theater, and I wonder if something like that could ever emerge in the United States in a significant way. I was curious about how the politics of identity and representation ‘plays out’ in theatrical traditions around the world.

Cinematic Techniques and Projection

Written and directed by Rufus Norris and staged at the Young Vic (at the Barbican), *Sleeping Beauty* (2002) is based on the Charles Perrault story but perhaps cannot avoid foregrounding its differences from the animated Disney film version of the story.

Connected to the overlapping space-times in plays such as *Sleeping Beauty*, there seemed

to be a spectatorial and scene-change mentality that mimicked the quick-cuts of film. As with Goody, for instance, discusses the past with various male suitors to Beauty, they move slightly off-stage and the scenes become acted out before their eyes on the circular revolve stage as if they were watching a movie. Spectators in the audience become aligned with this cinematographic positioning and similarly engage with the 'present tense' of film. Indeed, while there is an explicit past tense in language, for film, all elements of time-spaces emerge before our eyes as present moments, despite the use of flashback techniques and the presentation of events as occurring before or after other events.

Thematically, the use of cinematic techniques helps to explore the infiltration of the past upon a present moment. In *Sleeping Beauty*, the events of the past, such as the ones that lead to the curse and Beauty's sleep, bear upon the present action. By beginning with a male suitor and then flashing back to how Beauty arrived in her sleeping state, *Sleeping Beauty* invokes ideas of ineluctable fate, such as the seeming unavoidability of the curse's fulfillment even though Goody tries to rescind it and protect Beauty. The slight cinematic nature of the staging brought out a more fluid intercutting of past and present, a dynamic which allowed thematics of fate and destiny to play out. Many students, including myself, also commented on the cinematic nature of the staging for *His Dark Materials*, which also deals with notions of fate and destiny. The quick scene changes and overlapping sets of the revolve stage at the Olivier Theatre paralleled the quick cuts of film, as each scene moved upon the next in rapid succession while maintaining a flow of unseen set changes. The large stage also allowed for a certain scope

of sets that evoked cinema, and Brenna mentioned that there are, in fact, plans to turn the play into a film.

More explicit use of cinematic techniques occurred in the staging of *The History Boys*, *The Woman in White*, *Solid Gold Cadillac*, *Julius Caesar*, and *The Producers*. In *The History Boys*, along with the flashy history films narrated by Irwin, the staging at the Lyttelton Theatre made use of short video sequences in the style of rock videos of the 1980s. Along with an added 1980s contextualization of the films, the music video sequences amplified the question of historical representation as the characters appeared both on the screen through images and sound and on stage. In conjunction with the hooky journalistic aesthetic of Irwin's history documentary segments, the music videos played during scene changes foregrounded the modes in which history can be understood and represented. The characters on stage may seem less distant and more 'present' to spectators, yet dramatic performance with live bodies also calls into question here the ability to collapse historical distance, much as the class discussions by the boys with Irwin centered around how to 'pitch' or 'frame' history for the examination committee. *History Boys* also staged tensions between theatrical and cinematic modes as the boys acted out scenes from films which Hector then had to name, all part of a game of 'stump the teacher' to win the pool, but these scenes were more than pleasant distraction. The link to cinema highlights history as a web of allusions and intertexts within which one recognizes oneself as both an actor and, for the most part, a spectator.

The Andrew Lloyd Webber musical *The Woman in White* (2004), like *History Boys*, juxtaposes theatrical and cinematic modes. Staged at the Palace Theatre and directed by Trevor Nunn, there is a mesmerizing contrast between the live actors in the

revolving stage and the projected, computer-generated graphics of the sets behind them. The juxtaposition blends the scope and richness of cinematic productions with the presence of live bodies in front of us on stage. While William Dudley's production and video design provides detailed backdrops for the actors, it also potentially elicits an imaginative response in spectators, who 'fill in the gaps' and create a fully-realized set in their minds. The cinematic techniques also create a more sweeping feel that is congruent with the music and the question of representation. As Walter takes Laura and Marian on a nature-painting expedition, for instance, the act of painting draws attention to the computer-generated backdrops, which would have been painted in the nineteenth century, and the relationship between drama and 'realistic' modes of representation. Indeed, the painting that Walter gives to Laura is not of the nature scenes around them but of her, though the prop is actually a computer-modified photograph made to resemble a painting. Both Collins' *Woman in White* novel and its musical adaptation continuously deal with doubles, similarities and deception, such as the similarity between the appearance of Ann and Laura. Cinematic techniques in the production thus do not merely provide lavish spectacle but invoke certain questions around what is real and what is simulated inherent in the original novel and its gothic aura.

Staged at the Garrick Theatre and directed by Ian Brown, *Solid Gold Cadillac* (1954) uses a video screen to create a sense of the 1950s aura of production and representation. The video inserts frame the story and parallel it to *Cinderella* in ways that mock capitalism, akin to *The Mandate*'s satires of various political-economic models: bourgeois enterprise merchants, communists, Tsarists, and proletariats. Much as the characters in *The Mandate* are caught in the social upheaval of the communist revolution,

the video inserts in *Solid Gold Cadillac* also draw attention to how the emergence of television media revolutionized the imagination of ‘the public’ that had occurred previously through print and radio. The reporters flock around Edward McKeever (Roy Hudd) and Laura Patridge (Patricia Routledge) as they embark from the plane because of the speculation of a romantic relationship between them. This paparazzi mentality foregrounds the mediatized spectacle of the emerging Age of Television. In *The Mandate*, the characters become hyper-aware of themselves as possibly observed by the communist authorities and construct elaborate performances, such as Pavel’s instruction to his ‘Mummy’ about looking through the peephole and changing the painting over to the Karl Marx portrait if communists knock on the door: “Well, then the commissar just hangs around for a bit, spots the picture, and then off he goes” (I). In *Solid Gold Cadillac*, Edward and Laura become hyper-aware of themselves as media personalities: the former CEO of General Products Inc. who has quit Washington and returned with a mystery woman. The television mini-films channel an air of corporate promotional videos from the 1950s and juxtapose nicely with the slick advertising campaigns of today. Likewise, the cartoonishly greedy and incompetent ‘four ugly corporate executives’ of this revival by Brown draw attention to the ways that corporations carefully manage CEO media images (Bill Gates of Microsoft, Phil Knight of Nike, Howard Schultz of Starbucks, Sam Walton of Wal-Mart, etc.) in the twenty-first century amidst ‘ugly’ issues of monopolies, sweatshop labor, employee treatment and so forth.

The Swan Theatre’s production of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, directed by David Farr and designed by Ti Green, more radically uses urban warfare and television screens to highlight the mediatization and representation of power relationships between

rulers and ruled. Beginning with Julius Caesar, the face of each successive ruler appears on the television screen and many parts of the play are both staged before us and shown on the screen. This mediatized dynamic emphasizes power as working within warfare as an extension of the logic of politics, persuasion, representation and spectatorship.

Shakespeare often calls attention to power as a kind of performance with recognizable symbols and props, such as the mock-crowning ceremony in Henry IV part one between Prince Hal and Falstaff. Indeed, Shakespearean metadramatic devices call attention to both the actor-leader and the 'real life' leader as performing in certain roles that both rely upon the staging of leadership. The use of the TV screen in this staging of *Julius Caesar* amplifies metadrama to include meta-media parallels between the dynamics of ancient Rome and modern day power struggles, where language, rhetoric, image and performance also dominate. Antony's infamous 'lend me your ears' speech and its biting irony about the 'honorable men,' namely Brutus and Cassius, who slew Caesar is a masterpiece of rhetoric that initially seems to praise the slayers and then condemns them. The implication is that modern media are an extension of the persuasive energy of rhetoric. Antony stirs the crowd to revenge, especially after they hear Caesar had provided money to be distributed to each citizen of Rome—a rhetorical device not unlike the political efficacy of staging tax breaks in the contemporary U.S.A. as media events.

Akin to *Sweeney Todd*, where musicians played in sight near the actors and acted out roles as well, the *Julius Caesar* production at the Swan blurs the line between offstage and on-stage as technicians operating behind the main stage, sitting at large mixing boards and operating audiovisual equipment, seem to provide both the technical apparatus of the play (sound effects, music, etc.) as well as play a part in the general

urban warfare, multimedia milieu of the production. The various explosive sound effects highlight points of action and parallel the explosions later heard during the battle-scenes. At the end of the play, the ghost (?) of Caesar returns to switch off and carry off the static-playing boom-box in the middle of the stage—perhaps an indication that the cycle of power struggles continues, regardless of whose face is projected on the TV at any one moment.

In relation to *Julius Caesar*, the acrobatic *Romeo and Juliet* connects to cinema and media in a less direct manner. I am unclear about the extent to which the Vesturport Theatre Company connects to the troupe portrayed in the documentary *Love is in the Air*, directed by Ragnar Bragason, which charts the journey of an Icelandic acting troupe bringing their circus-like experimental acrobatic version of *Romeo and Juliet* to the London stage at the Young Vic, where the acrobatic *Romeo and Juliet* was originally staged in October of 2000. Indeed, with the fact that the acrobatic *Romeo and Juliet* is subtitled *Love is in the Air* and copies of the film were on sale in the theatre lobby, I imagine that the connections are there. The acrobatic *Romeo and Juliet* thus produces an extratextual link between the film version and the stage version—a relationship that is not just one of ‘translation’ but of two complementary media, where the play-within-the-film becomes the play we are watching. Similarly, the acrobatic *Romeo and Juliet* is a translation of Shakespeare’s play, an unusual version with added material, but the performance brings into question the notion of a ‘master text,’ since the performance works in a manner similar to dominant modes of pre-modern and early modern authorship, namely the virtuoso modification of source material: Chaucer, Gower, Shakespeare, Marlowe, Malory, and so forth. While every performance of a Shakespeare

play is a ‘version,’ the acrobatic *Romeo and Juliet* adds material and modifies the play in a way that could be called an ‘original’ work in the Shakespearean authorial mode:

Romeo and Juliet: Love is in the Air. The link to cinema foregrounds issues of adaptation and ‘translation’ from plays and novels to film—whether the book is the ‘master’ text and the film is a ‘translation’ or if the film becomes an ‘original’ work on its own terms.

The connection to cinema in *The Producers* serves to work as an in-joke at several points in the performance. For one, along with Stormtrooper Rolf’s line, “I was born in Dusseldorf und that is why they call me Rolf,” the voice of Mel Brooks from the original film is dubbed into one of the lines during the song “Springtime for Hitler”: “Don’t be stupid, be a smarty, come and join the Nazi party!” This moment of obvious lip-synching by two actors during the song is a winking reference to film overdubbing of voices rather than the usually live performances of Broadway. Likewise, asked to ‘fix up’ the office, the cinematic joke in the second act is that the buxom secretary, Ulla (Leigh Zimmerman), paints the office all white, including the couches, the walls, the desk and so forth. The punch line comes as the newly-whitened office acts as a projector screen for multiple copies of Ulla’s beautiful face as Leo dreams about her and then copies of the face of Leo (Lee Evans) as she dreams about him. The extra layer to the joke is that the projection upon the white backdrop alludes to film, for *The Producers* was adapted by Mel Brooks and Tom Meehan in 2001 from the 1968 film, which was written and directed by Brooks.

In my discussion of the performance of race, I wondered if comedy can involve a certain transgression of decorum. The carnivalesque mode of *The Producers*, for example, allows for a greater encounter with historical trauma in a safer psychological

space. In the original film version, for instance, the audience is walking out on the play in disgust after the opening number, “Springtime for Hitler,” until the first acting scene, where a stoned-out hippie plays Hitler planning his military strategy with a blues song at the piano. The audience returns to their seats, taking the performance as farce and then laughs and enjoys the rest of the play. Hitler becomes a clueless buffoon within this framework and the play, despite the plans of Bailystock and Bloom, becomes a hit. While the original film had songs in it, it was not a musical per se, since all the songs occurred as part of the ‘realistic’ diegesis: during rehearsals, songs by the crazy Nazi playwright, or performances rather than characters suddenly breaking into songs to forward themes and narrative elements. The adaptation of the film to a Broadway musical increased the musical content considerably and continually draws attention to itself as a Broadway production.

Adaptation and Re-writing

Along with *The Producers*, many of the plays we saw in London were adaptations or re-writings of earlier works in other formats, such as *Festen*, *Grand Hotel*, *The Woman in White*, *His Dark Materials*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *By the Bog of Cats*, *Playboy of the West Indies* and Matthew Bourne’s *Swan Lake*. The film version of *The Producers* curiously had only a modest success but a cult following while the Broadway version became a smash hit. The film version made in-jokes about Broadway as well as film. For instance, as Max and Leo are concocting their scheme by a fountain, Leo Bloom (Gene Wilder) says “I want everything I’ve ever seen in the movies.” As opposed to a film about a Broadway production, however, *The Producers* (2001) is a Broadway-style musical about

Broadway-style musicals. In-jokes abound about homosexuals in the theatre and a literalization of the phrase ‘break a leg’ as the Nazi playwright, set to play the lead, breaks his leg on opening night. Meanwhile, Leo (unknowingly) and Max (knowingly) wish everyone ‘good luck,’ though despite their efforts the musical becomes a toast of the town and the two are arrested. David Eldridge adapted *Festen* from the Dogme film and play by Thomas Vinterberg, Mogens Rukov and Bo hr. Hansen. The Dogme manifesto involves the use of natural light and sets and little post-production gloss or ‘Hollywood magic,’ and the simplicity of the Lyric Theatre’s production draws upon a similar aesthetic.

Grand Hotel (1989) was adapted from Austrian popular novelist Vicki Baum’s book *Mencschen Im Hotel* (*People in a Hotel*, 1929), a book which she dramatized for the Berlin stage. The Oscar-winning 1932 best picture film version based on William A. Drake’s English language adaptation of Baum’s novel and play became the basis for the screenplay of the film, which stars Greta Garbo (Grusinskaya), John Barrymore (the Baron) and Joan Crawford (Flaemmchen). The film may have been a minor reference point for the musical, particularly the quick-cuts between scenes and characters, such as the telephone scene that opens the film. As well, the constant fog of smoke created by cigarettes in the film continues in the Donmar Warehouse production we saw, with its cigarettes and dry ice. With music and lyrics by Robert Wright, George Forrest and Maury Yeston, the shift from the novel (and perhaps film) to a musical format plays up the larger-than-life personalities and creates narrative and character through song and minimal dialogue. The musical shifts focus away from the subtle acting in the film and

towards a highly-stylized Broadway version of the time period that plays with a sensational aesthetic and melodrama.

Regardless of how much the production intentionally or unintentionally drew upon the film version, there are some interesting differences in the narrative and the characters between the film and the musical (I have not read the original book). For instance, the setting of the film mentions hard financial times for many of the characters, but the musical explicitly sets itself in 1928, a short while before the stock market crash in October 1929, the year the original novel was published. Rather than winning money while gambling, as the Baron was trying to make some quick cash to repay his gambling debts after he decides to return the necklace to Grushinskaya because he feels he loves her, in the musical Jewish bookkeeper Otto Kringlein becomes rich in the stock market overnight based on a tip from the Baron. The stock, it turns out, is for Preysing's company, whose stock goes up overnight based on (false) news propagated by Preysing that the Boston merger has gone through. In the film, Preysing lies about a deal with a Manchester company in order to help a merger deal go through. The reference to stocks and the market more explicitly places the action of the musical in between the wars in a moment of hope just before the great Depression from 1929-39. The musical thus plays up the absurdity of characters living beyond their means in the Grand Hotel, though Kringlein is still terminally ill and spending his money before he dies, "finally living," and the Baron is still a hotel thief trying to pay his gambling debts. The specter of World War I, the 'Great War,' looms over the action of the film and, to a lesser extent, the musical as well. The character of the Colonel-Doctor Otternschlag (Gary Raymond) is physically scarred by the war, with his face stained from a grenade explosion, and

psychologically as well, reflected in his drug addiction acted out in the production of the musical at the Donmar Warehouse and not, if barely, mentioned in the film. Likewise, the motif of paying back debts present in the Baron perhaps alludes to Germany's debts due to reparations and economic slump after the War. Seen from a post WW II vantage point the Jewish character of Kringlein also functions as a specter of death for the upcoming Nazi regime and the Holocaust. Hitler becomes chancellor in 1933, but the setting of the musical acts as a kind of pre-Nazi chaos embodied by the multiple lives and storylines at the hotel.

Grand Hotel is not merely despair and the artificiality of its luxurious lifestyles, however, but brings out cycles of death and birth, despair and hope. In both the film and musical, the character of the aging ballerina Grushinskaya fears she has lost her energy and will to dance, though she becomes reborn and re-energized through her sudden feelings for Baron Felix Von Gaigern—a situation which resonates with Ken's empowerment and re-energizing through his love of Peggy in *Playboy of the West Indies*. To emphasize the cycle of birth/death and hope/despair, the musical version of *Grand Hotel* changes the character of Flaemmchen slightly, for example, making her pregnant. The news of her pregnancy makes Kringlein very happy at the end of the musical and links to the birth of the concierge's son. The character in the musical is of a lower standing than the film, where he is the head concierge. Thus, the issue of Erik Litnauer leaving work to see the birth of his son becomes more of an issue since the hotel's manager, Rohna, does not allow him to go. In the film, too, the question of moral choices is equally problematic, but Flaemmchen appears set to sleep with Preysing, while in the musical the Baron explicitly prevents Preysing from accosting Flaemmchen after she

decides not to go through with it. However, in both cases, the Baron happens to be in the room to steal money from Preysing, who shoots the Baron in the musical in a skirmish while in the film Preysing beats him to death with a telephone in the heat of the moment. Thus, while both the film and the musical begin with switchboard operators and various calls going on by the character to establish their respective situations, the film more explicitly makes the telephone an instrument of death.

Also adapted from a novel, Andrew Lloyd Webber adapts Wilkie Collins' Victorian novel *Woman in White* in a manner of styled, larger-than-life spectacle that is appropriate to sensational atmosphere of the source material while *His Dark Materials* adapts Philip Pullman's novels with a keen attention to their mood and tone along with narrative and characterization. The addition of music to Collins' story plays up the emotional impact of the work, and akin to *Grand Hotel*, much of the characterization occurs through song. With lyrics by David Zippel, "All For Laura," for instance, illustrate the heartbreaking sacrifice of Marion's efforts to rescue Laura and reunite her with Walter, even though she herself loves him unrequitedly and romance may have blossomed between them in Laura's absence. "You Can Get Away with Anything" playfully illustrates Count Fosco's deviousness and collaboration with Sir Percival Glyde. I have not read the original novels by Philip Pullman, but the stage adaptation of *His Dark Materials* by Nicholas Wright specifically for the Olivier Theatre effectively uses spectacle and the assistance of Philip Pullman, who consulted with Wright on the project. In comments that parallel film production, Wright emphasizes the collaborative nature of stage production, even though "playwrights like to think that they're the sole author of everything that happens on stage." Authorship is in some sense always

collaborative re-writing, whether it involves working with a production team or merely writing within the web of intertextuality. *His Dark Materials* creates not just a 'translation' of the novels. As Wright argues in the introduction of the playscript, Pullman's comforting advice that "books are one thing, and this is another" "has always led us closer towards a piece of theatre that stands up in its own right, not as a shadow of his stupendous novels." The play creates a mode of storytelling that is larger-than-life, which is typical of myth, epic, fantasy and the extended journeys of romance

Similarly, several of the other plays worked within the tradition of fairy tales. "Based on Charles Perrault's story about what happens after Beauty awakens into a perilous world with a husband who is half human and half ogre" (Peck, class syllabus), writer-director Rufus Norris updates and re-writes *Sleeping Beauty*. There are not only with the addition of flatulent fairies (a by-product of magic) but also a whole second act after the Prince awakens Sleeping Beauty. Rather than one 'master' text and its re-writing, however, this production at the Young Vic epitomizes the folk tale and fairy tale tradition of continual re-writing and adaptation. In many ways, *By the Bog of Cats* by Marina Carr also works within the fairy tale tradition, such as the motif of the missing mother, in the foggy, nebulous space that is physically within the bogs and figuratively within the liminal space between the traditions of myth and dramatic realism. The stylized child-like wooden cutouts that represented houses brings to mind the storytelling tradition of fairy tales and their focus on archetypes of home, mother, child, and death. Immediately in the first scene, for instance, as Hester Swane drags a dead swan across the stage, the encounter with the ghost fancier places her in a kind of predestination for death

or an intimation of her death wish. The link between Swane and Swan becomes apparent amidst the prophecies that Hester will live only one day longer than the swan.

Carr's play rewrites the story of Medea and adapts it for a modern Irish setting, yet like Matthew Bourne's reworking of Tchaikovsky's ballet *Swan Lake*, there is an interesting tension between modern life and the mythic space of the play. Characters take snapshots with digital in the Wyndham Theatre's production of *Bog of Cats* amidst the foggy mythical space where the time period is unclear and hazy. Matthew Bourne's version of *Swan Lake* uses Tchaikovsky's music but places the action in settings such as the nightclub 'Swank' and mixes traditional ballet movements with modern dance and even disco-stylized swan-like head-bobbing in the nightclub. In the original *Swan Lake*, Prince Siegfried falls in love with Swan Queen Odette, a woman trapped in a body of a bird until a man's love can rescue her; however, the Prince is tricked by the sorcerer, von Rothbart, who also placed the curse upon Odette, into declaring his love for Odile, Odette's evil twin. Eventually, the Prince battles the sorcerer and the two lovers are reunited.

Early in the Bourne ballet, there is an interesting tension between the mythic structure of the story and the concrete details of the modernized set, props and choreography. For instance, sitting together, the Prince, his girlfriend and his mother watch a ballet, the ballet-with-the-ballet, which implies a relationship between a 'master' text and its rewriting and adaptation as a kind of observation and modification. This spectatorial relationship brings out the tension between the more traditional world of fairies and nature found in the ballet they are watching versus the girlfriend's cellphone that rings during the performance. The cellphone ringing is not merely a display of poor

decorum on the girlfriend's part but stages a juxtaposition between time-spaces and forms of communication. Akin to the mass of inquisitive reporters around Edward and Laura in *Solid Gold Cadillac* during the airport scene, the paparazzi's photography of the Prince epitomizes modern media culture and its obsession with celebrity image and scandal. Indeed, as Brenna pointed out in her presentation, Bourne uses sets, choreography and costumes to not only update the *Swan Lake* ballet but to make the story more accessible to wider audiences. Likewise, the traditional, aristocratic world of the Prince comes into an ambivalent relationship with the modern, urban and 'humble masses,' such as the lower class girlfriend character or the 'Swank' night club scene. As Bourne's juxtaposes 'high' cultural dance forms, such as ballet, with nightclub dancing and 'low' culture, he invokes both the traditional elitist audiences of ballets and those on the fringes of high culture who find that ballet requires special knowledge for its enjoyment. In this way, by making ballet more 'funky' and 'hip,' Bourne draws in audiences who may find traditional ballet exclusionary. At the same time, the subtext here seems to be that culture does not have an absolute standard for the evaluation of works. Instead, taste or distinction involves the reproduction of elite social class structures through an enjoyment of certain kinds of art, music, literature, film and dance that contrasts with the aesthetic sensibility of those positioned as the lower class or fringes of society.

The fringes of Irish society in *By the Bog of Cats*, its world of gypsies, nomads and womb-like caravans, resonate with the space of John Millington Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*, which Mustapha Matura shifts to the fringes of Trinidadian society in *Playboy of the West Indies* and the Tricycle Theatre stages as 'fringe theatre.' Matura adapts John Millington Synge's play by transferring the setting from early twentieth

century Ireland in the peasant town of Mayo to August 1950 Trinidad, in the peasant town of Mayaro. When *Playboy of the Western World* opened at the Abbey Theatre on January 26th 1907, riots soon followed as protest from those who objected to the play, which seemed to “represent the Irish as violent and superstitious, blatherers, braggarts, sots, and above all obscene”—a portrayal that appeared in contradistinction to nationalistic movements (Kelsall xiii). However, as Malcolm Kelsall points out, “even as Synge’s work embodies those ideals, it changes, and even subverts or mocks them” (xiv). Synge was involved in the National Theatre Movement, centered at the Abbey Theatre in 1904 and *Playboy* does, in many ways, replace the cartoonish image of the “stage Irishmen” with ‘authentic’ language and culture drawn from Irish peasantry. Following the advice of Yeats, who suggested Synge could find dramatic material amongst the locals, Synge spent five summers in the Aran islands, where he was welcomed by the locals and gained a sense of the local forms of speech.

In his preface to the play, Synge sets out his intentions for a more authentic representation of the Irish peasants, one that includes their imaginative lives: “in countries where the imagination of the people, and the language they use, is rich and living, it is possible for a writer to be rich and copious in his words, and at the same time to give the reality, which is the root of all poetry, in a comprehensive and natural form” (Synge 1-2). While the action is comically absurd and preposterous, underlying the play is an attention to the details of peasant life and speech in a manner that suggested to Matura a kinship between Ireland and Trinidad that allowed for an adaptation of the play to the rural language and life of Trinidad in the 1950s. In his 2004 introduction of the play’s revival, Matura remarks that “I set *Playboy of the West Indies* in the remote fishing

village in my home island Trinidad because of the cultural similarities of the people of Colonial Ireland and Colonial Trinidad and the shared appreciation for the beauty and poetry of language. Even when discussing the merits of murdering your father.”

The 1800 Act of Union had brought together England, Wales, Ireland and Scotland under one political entity, “The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland,” though a series of potato famines in the mid 1800s brought economic hardship upon rural peasants in Ireland. Thousands of peasants sailed for hopes of a better life in the United States, and many Irish felt the British could have done more to preserve the abandoned farmland in places such as Mayo and Galway, while others blamed the peasant reliance on a single crop. By 1858, the newly-formed Irish Republican Brotherhood (‘Fenians’) aimed to establish by force an independent Irish republic. While the Fenians were primarily interested in independence, the aim of Isaac Butt’s Home Rule Party was merely to reestablish an Irish Parliament—nationhood on the island. In 1879, Charles Stewart Parnell became Home Rule leader and spear-headed a stronger move towards Irish Nationalism after the party combined efforts with Land campaigns. Michael Davitt, a farmer from Mayo, headed these new land-reform movements, which emerged as protest against high taxes on land even in hard economic times. The independence-minded Fenians staged a revolt in 1867 but were easily defeated by the British forces. The combined Home Rule-Land Reform political movement, Irish nationalism, found expression in various artistic movements such as plays staged at the Abbey Theatre.

Irish nationalism and republicanism parallel to some extent the political situation in Trinidad. Both are islands who experienced a series of colonizations by foreign powers and contain peasant areas working with a small number of dominant crops

(Ireland: potatoes vs. Trinidad: sugar cane and tobacco for the export market or fish for domestic consumption) who developed a unique parochial form of language drawn from the Standard English of the British Empire. Christopher Columbus, who discovered the island in 1498, bequeathed the island to Spain, which enslaved the native Caribs and Arawaks. Sugar plantations begun in the 17th century operated largely by imported African slaves. Spain later opened up the island in 1776 to Roman Catholic sugar planters from Eastern Caribbean islands to make Trinidad more profitable. After 300 years of Spanish rule, amidst raids by the Dutch and the French, the British, who were at war with Spain and France at the time, conquered the island. The British officially gained control of the island in 1802 under the Treaty of Amiens. After slavery was abolished in the UK in 1834, the British government allowed for indentured labor to be imported from places such as India, China and Portugal. The British kept Trinidad as a crown colony until 1956, and Trinidad did not become an independent member of the British Commonwealth until 1962. In 1976, Trinidad became a republic.

Playboy of the West Indies thus parallels the situations of colonization in relationship to the British Empire and one can read the play, as one can Synge's work, as an allegory of empowerment through storytelling and language. Allegorically, Kenneth's stories about killing his father embody a fraught and embattled relationship between Trinidad and Britain. Through the stories, Ken feels his own power and even gains the love of Peggy. In contrast to the description by his father of Ken as weak and incompetent, this reborn Ken gains confidence and strength from his stories, his embrace by the locals and the admiration of Peggy. The version of Ken encountered by the villagers contrasts greatly with the version told by Mac and this juxtaposition thematizes

the role of power in storytelling and history: who has the authority to tell the stories and who narrates one's existence and history? When she tells her version of the events, Mama Benin tells the others to be quiet for, she says, this is "my story." Mama's version positions Mac as a madman who only deludes himself into thinking that Ken is his son and, taken figuratively, this story is perhaps an indictment against the false sense of ownership that the British government had with its colonies—power as a kind of madness that takes other countries for its children within a patronizing, brutalizing and demeaning attitude epitomized by Mac's comments on his son. The treatment of the mad, in some ways, uncovers implicit dynamics of human relationships. In a discussion with Mama Benin on the ill treatment of the mad in the village, Mac comments, "Yes, is wen yer mad, yer does see what human beings made outta" (III).

The question of madness versus rationality foregrounds the problem of defining madness: who has the authority to define it and under what terms? This link between madness and colonialism, from another angle, also implies madness as a disruption of the colonial authority's setting of the terms by which normal/abnormal and reasonable/mad become established. Hegemony produces a shared view of what is the 'natural' order of things, which madness disrupts. If sanity under colonialism is to become a 'perfect' and compliant colonial citizen, then madness and irrationality unfix the very foundations of the system which supports and rationalizes colonialism as an enterprise. On one hand, the plot of *Playboy of the West Indies* is, like *Playboy of the Western World*, 'crazy': a man who stumbles into a rum house, tells stories about killing his father, is embraced by the locals as a sort of hero until his father returns in the flesh. However, madness challenges the Enlightenment notion of an autonomous and rational subject that

subvented various colonial enterprises, such as the ‘civilizing’ missions of colonial education of the locals. Colonial authorities set the terms by which history becomes record, and power becomes positioned as center or margin. The joke around Ken ‘passing his exam in father killing’ resonates with issues of education and irrational actions that expose the mad logic of colonialism and slavery. If education within the colonies is an acculturation to the colonizers’ worldview, tastes, morality, and opinions, then madness resists this acculturation and, in some cases, takes it to an extreme. For example, is Ken’s ‘killing’ of his father a replication of the killing and brutality of the British government within colonialism or an echo of the foundations of the Western intellectual tradition in Oedipal narratives: self-definition through ritualized killing of the father, previous generations of artists and scholars through one’s own stories and essays?

How does storytelling work within this inter-generational process of empowerment and self-definition? In contrast to Mac’s descriptions of his son as weak, who “didn’t ‘no he left foot from he right,” after empowering himself through his well-received stories and his growing love for Peggy, Ken even wins handily the local games on Discovery Day, which celebrates Christopher Columbus (III). However, Ken’s performance in the games radically alters Mac’s ways of seeing Ken, a change that at first completely baffles him: “A ‘no, it doh make no sense at all. (*Cheers* [from Ken’s victories in the Discovery Games]) I really going mad now yer ‘no” (III). Indeed, Ken’s visit to Mayo becomes a discovery process for his own power. The phrase ‘Nancy boy’ in the play may seem to connote feminization rather than ‘masculine’ prowess, yet the figure of anancy saturates Caribbean folklore. Imported from Africa during slavery, anancy is a spider, a trickster figure, a storyteller, a weaver of deceptions. Lying and

language become means of camouflage from the gaze of the Imperial rulers through the various webs of criss-crossing Atlantic traffic patterns of the Middle Passage.

The Trinidadian dialect, for instance, becomes a means for locals to talk amongst themselves in a transmuted version of Standard English sometimes no longer recognizable to colonial authorities. Synge altered Standard English to give a sense of the local Mayo dialect, which re-defines language at the level of the local. The official language of Trinidad is English, but Matura shifts terms and illustrates through peasant dialect the inscription of local ways of seeing in language that ‘organically’ emerges. For instance, Synge’s *Widow Quin* becomes Matura’s *Mama Benin*. The language shift reflects local color and an analogous subversion of Standard English, which inscribes a certain dynamic of power relations and hegemonic ways of seeing. In Standard English, the last line in Act II, for example, might be something like “Well, if worse comes to worst, it will be very humorous to find that the only one who pities him [Christy/Ken] is a widow woman such as myself, who has buried her children and murdered her husband.” In Synge, the line reads, “Well, if the worst come in the end of all, it’ll be great game to see there’s none to pity him but a widow woman, the like of me, has buried her children and destroyed her man” (II). In Matura, the line becomes, “Well, if de worst come ter de worst, it go be really funny ter see if all he have ter fall back on is me, a obeah woman who bury her children an get rid a she ole man” (II). The presence of *Mama Benin* as an obeah woman, one who practices folk religion, recontextualizes the play to draw attention to how local forms of knowledge subvert the colonial attention to scientific, empirical ways of seeing along with a (sometimes incompatible) Christian worldview. All three versions are understandable, but the shift by Synge and Matura creates a sense of ‘skew’

in relation to the colonial center and Standard English, which both produce and draw upon various ‘bastardizations’ of ‘master’ texts and ‘improper’ uses of speech to reinscribe what is ‘Standard.’ Matura, in adapting and re-writing *Playboy of the Western World*, skews a play that already stands in tension with colonial authority and English, thus drawing parallels to power dynamics and local self-definition within language use.

Likewise, the set at the Tricycle Theatre, where I saw the performance, is slightly askew and slanted and visually alludes not only to questions of perspective and distortion in seeing, but the skewing of facts done through storytelling. The set appears almost like a Renaissance perspective drawing, implicating the Renaissance as both a shift in artistic methodology or aesthetics and an age of travel and exploration that altered the previous ways of seeing through contact with other peoples and cultures around the globe.

Playboy’s set resonates with the caravan in the *By the Bog of Cats* production with Holly Hunter at Wyndham’s Theatre, which also played with questions of perspective, storytelling and distortions of facts. In both *Playboy of the West Indies* and *By the Bog of Cats*, there is a representation of peasants living on the margins of urban centers, either by the sea or around the bog. *By the Bog of Cats* pushes this marginality into the realm of myth, magic and ghosts, retelling the Medea tragedy in the bogs of Ireland. Thus, *Bog of Cats* is a re-telling and adaptation that also deals with questions of centers and margins both geographically and socio-economically.

In *Playboy*, Ken is urban-born, and the play reflects tensions between the town and the city as well as between anti-colonialism, colonialism and the *comprador* class, which aligns itself with the colonizers to attain power, acts as a mediator between colonized and colonizers, and often emulates the ideals of the British gentlemen. Ken

contrasts Stanley, Peggy's betrothed, whom Peggy calls disparagingly an "English gentleman" who is "too decent and ambitious" (III). As opposed to Ken's tales of violence, Stanley is an upright citizen and businessman. However, the villagers turn on Ken when his father, Old Mac, returns, wounded on the head but not dead. The villagers, especially Peggy, seem enthralled by the stories of Ken killing his father, but they become horrified at the actual sight of blood-stained violence acted out before their eyes. The question of violence in revolution and independence movements thus arises, bringing this mode into tension with cultural self-definition through storytelling. The blow on the head perhaps symbolizes an attack on the crown, the head of Empire in the monarchy, while Mac's return embodies the difficulty of abolishing the Empire easily.

In tension with Empire, storytelling contrasts with official history, but there also emerges in the play an allusion to historiography gradually recognizing the value of the local. From one angle, Mac can be read as an allegorical representation of Empire, yet this reading becomes complicated by his conversations with historiographers. For instance, in Act III, Mac proudly boasts, "An I, de state a in, had a teacher feller writing down everything a say fer he history book, yer'd never believe dat en, looking at me, a real teacher with paper her he name an ting." There is thus a link between storytelling and historical narrativization—the emergence of local knowledge within larger historiographical projects. The palimpsest of history written and re-written upon the island of Trinidad through various waves of colonization and shifts in population exposes traces of those in the very soil of the land. In a hypothetical discussion of the possibility that the corpse of Ken's father might be found by the police, for example, Jim replies that "Dem professor an ting go say it was some Carib or Arawak king, or one a Columbus

boys get left behind. I hear dey have plenty bones in de Institute, with a piece a jug an plate” (III). This project of collection, documentation and museumification of Trinidad’s history links to a relationship of surveillance by colonial authorities, an impulse to understand that implies a relation of dominance. The motif of surveillance also resonates with Ken’s storytelling, which forms an alternate version of historiography. As Ken talks to local girls about his exploits, Peggy warns Ken that his storytelling of his patricide will spread and be heard by the King of England. Thus, the question of monitoring and surveillance by the colonial authorities emerges along with the possibility of violent struggle. However, at the end of the play, Ken fights his father and eventually gains mastery of him through the mere threat of violence, so a new power balance between them is in the works. I wondered what it meant that Mac unties Ken, sets him free and then jokes how they will tell stories in the future about the bloodthirsty fools of Mayaro. Humorously, in the last lines of the play, Peggy then mourns, “Oh Lord, I lost him, the only playboy of the West Indies.” The play therefore ends with questions of love being possible or impossible within certain oppressive social structures as well as the torture of retrospective insight.

In Bourne’s *Swan Lake*, the oppressive social structures are represented by the Prince’s overbearing mother and the party crowds who laugh at him as he mistakes the stranger and the Swan. In Bourne’s version, the Swan/Stranger is male and all the swans in the ensemble are also male—a dynamic that brings out both questions of gender and sexual orientation. Brenna noted in her presentation that Bourne denies he was constructing a ‘gay ballet’ yet admits possible homosexual undertones. Brenna argued that, as read through Celtic mythology’s symbolization of the soul through bird imagery,

the swans are manifestations of the Prince himself, his soul. In contrast, Geoff argued that the relationship between the Prince and Swan King is that of the pursuit of an ideal love object within an oppressive social world that kills it—a notion perhaps typified by the closing scene as the other swans turn on the Swan King and destroy him and the Swan holds the Prince in his arms, perhaps in the afterlife.

Re-staging Shakespeare

This question of frustrated or impossible love came up in our discussions of the acrobatic version of *Romeo and Juliet* as well. In his presentation, Geoff had us react to lines of a passage from the play (I read Romeo's part and Ilana played Juliet) with movement that we then froze into position. Akin to *Swan Lake*, the acrobatic *Romeo and Juliet* highlighted the connection between emotion, movement and space. 'Love's light wings' becomes literalized in the performance as actors leap and hang from bedsheets, a symbol of both the passion that unites Romeo and Juliet and the restrictions that tangle them up and eventually lead to their deaths. The final scene dramatically has Romeo and the other male leads hanging motionless by their feet from bedsheets, an inversion of the leaping and bounding and hanging upright earlier in the play, as Juliet, formerly like a caged bird sitting in her ring, gestures a hanging of herself by the neck. The bedsheets thus imply the entanglement of the two lovers and their families within their impossible romance. The moment when Romeo hangs between two swings had symbolized his tension between choices while the bedsheets illustrate a movement between the seemingly boundless possibilities of love and the *de casibus* tragedy of the play, the turning of fortune's wheel that bring one from a high place to a low place.

Along with the acrobatic *Romeo and Juliet*, other Shakespeare productions rework the theatrical material in interesting ways. The production of *Julius Caesar* sets the action within a landscape of urban warfare and political strife, a dynamic which implicitly draws parallels between Shakespeare's play and modern wars, such as the Gulf War and the recent operations in Iraq, staged for the media by the US government. The staging thus brings to mind the ways in which wars and elections become constructed and presented as media events: politics as a scripted performance through various mediatized modes of representation and imagination of spatial-geopolitical relationships between spectators and actors in history. The various scenes of chorus members hanging from scaffolding also reminded me of the acrobatic *Romeo and Juliet* and its use of space, such as the actor who performs the role of the singing, guitar-playing and pot-smoking crucifix in the acrobatic *Romeo and Juliet*. In Stratford, we also saw a production of *Two Gentleman of Verona*. Directed by Fiona Buffini and designed by Liz Ashcroft, the Swan Theatre's production of *Two Gentlemen of Verona* sets the action in 1930s New York. Dr. Peck argued in our seminar that the intersection of right angles found in the art deco aesthetic and city skyline of the set foregrounds the theme of things being at odds with each other, such as the urbanization of cultural values in Milan versus the small village of Verona, which is also the setting for *Romeo and Juliet*. In one scene, Silvia stands upon a balcony, reminiscent of the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet*, and Dr. Peck noted how Silvia is given a full range of character in the play and the balcony scene places her in a superior position. Silvia also comments on the picture of her. She refuses to be defined by the limitations of structures of representation, though both the productions of *Two Gentleman* and *Julius Caesar* foregrounded questions of representation. Both

productions also used the particularities of the theatrical space. The balcony, for instance, is literally one of the spectator boxes in *The Swan*. If *Julius Caesar* foregrounds the power of rhetoric, such as in Antony's incendiary speech, *Two Gentlemen* also deals with questions of language.

Along with the play's constant verbal sparring and wordplay, Proteus's love letter that Julia both tears up and wants to read embodies what Dr. Peck describes as faultlines within the structures of love traditions—the unknown terrain where one simultaneously follows a cultural script for 'appropriate' gendered behavior and sees the limitations of those roles. Julia's cross-dressing allows her greater freedom of movement than traditional gender roles allow and provides a sense of discipline and restraint she had not known. Julia's shape-shifting is a more positive version than Proteus's betrayal of his friend valentine as Proteus decides to pursue Silvia.

Language and Audience Interpellation

The tension between appearances and character also appears in the clothes-stealing scenes, where class markers and social networks become stripped away to reveal perhaps a sense of an inner self that breaks through at certain moments, or perhaps there are only ever performances. The performances in the acrobatic *Romeo and Juliet* were interesting because the actors switched to their native tongue of Icelandic at certain emotional climaxes in the play. The shift to Icelandic implies that certain moments break through the process of translation towards a more direct relationship between the actors and their dialogue, which has been translated into Icelandic and incorporated more closely to their native language and emotional centers. Along with questions of re-staging and

adaptation, the role of language and audience interaction within the plays brought out interesting tensions between translation and understanding. At the start of the performance of the acrobatic *Romeo and Juliet*, the chorus figure, given a strong role with added dialogue, began speaking Icelandic and then broke into English, joking with the audience and imagining their horror that the whole performance would be in Icelandic. The opening banter by the chorus figure (Peter, played by Vikingur Kristjansson), dressed in a union jack T-shirt and top hat, plays with the circus of nationality and brings an ‘anonymous’ member of the audience who arrives late on stage, an actor later revealed to be part of the troupe as he performs a somersault and looks back at the audience with a devilish grin.

This looking backing, a return gaze, performs a blurring of lines between audience and audience that appeared in some of the London stage productions we saw, such as *The Mandate* and *Aladdin*. In *The Mandate*, Pavel interpellates the audience as ‘comrades,’ casting spectators into the roles of silent communist witnesses to the action:

Autonom Sygizmundovich: The people are silent .

Pavel Sergeevich [*turning to the audience in the National Theatre production*]: Women and men and even little children, listen to me! You see before you a hero who is ready to lay down his life for the revolution! Women and men and even little children, this slut is planning to seize the Russian throne, but she will only over my cold body. I am absolutely serious.

This moment when Pavel is “absolutely serious” is a moment of absolute hilarity in the farcical context of the play. Yet, like the Producers, the comedy masks experiences of historical trauma within vast socio-political upheaval.

Working within the English pantomime tradition, the Old Vic’s production of *Aladdin* used audience banter and interaction as an inherent part of the overall performance. Characters constantly addressed and interacted with the audience. There seemed to be a certain expectation of this by the audience from the very opening of the performance as children hissed at the ‘bad guy,’ Abbanazar (Roger Allam) the moment he walked out on stage. Aladdin continuously faced the audience and talked to them in an over-the-top ‘Hi boys and girls, this is what’s going to happen’ kind of way. The production constantly called attention to itself as artifice and farce, with running jokes such as Dim Sum’s (Maureen Lipman) questions about the lack of the Chinese language in the play even though the action is supposed to be taking place in China. Issues of language, accent and nationality also appeared in the character of Aladdin, who spoke with a Scottish accent and wore tartan pants. Again, the pantomime not only consistently drew attention to itself as artifice but implied that national identity is a kind of performance and costume-game as well as a linguistic set of codes and conventions. The use of music in the performance was part of the tradition of English pantomime as well, in this instance taking the form of Disney-style songs.

On the Uses and Abuses of Music and Dance for Life

Many other productions I saw used music and dance in some form or another, from actual musicals like *Grand Hotel*, *The Woman in White* and *The Producers* to background music for dramatic action, such as *Fix-Up* and *His Dark Materials*. In particular, along with the powerful use of music in *Sweeney Todd* and *Festen*, I found the musical moments in the acrobatic *Romeo and Juliet* and the David Farr direction of *Julius Caesar* the most intriguing because they came as a pleasant surprise within these high caliber Shakespearean productions and engaged with some of the themes of the plays in interesting ways. I also enjoyed the music and dance sequences in Fiona Buffini's direction of *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, where music set the tone for the 1920s and 30s, the "Jazz Age."

In *Sweeney Todd: the Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, the production used repetition of bits of the title track through the performance to convey a haunting recurrence of murder/pie-baking scenes as well as to invoke the repetition of gossip and history. The repetition of the lyrics mimicked the repetition from person to person of tales of sensational horror passed down from person to person across time and geography, the birth of legend and its distortions over time in the process of re-telling and transformation into forms of storytelling: history as gossip and minor key ballad folksong running counterpoint to the major narratives of history. Indeed, Sondheim's songs in *Sweeney* frequently make use of the moody, haunting qualities of minor modes such as Aeolian, Dorian and Lydian rather than the typical Broadway-style exuberance of the Ionian (major key) mode. In the haunting opening of the musical, "The Ballad of Sweeney Todd," one character steps forward to sing "Attend the tale of Sweeney

Todd/His skin was pale and his eye was odd./He shaved the faces of gentlemen/Who never thereafter were heard of again./He trod a path that few have trod,/Did Sweeney Todd,/The Demon Barber of Fleet Street.” As a second actor continues the song with the next verse, there is a ‘psst pass it on’ type of quality here, the movement of tales through gossip and folk ballads: “He kept a shop in London town,/Of fancy clients and good renown/And what if all their souls were saved?/They went to their maker impeccably shaved/ By Sweeney Todd,/By Sweeney Todd,/The Demon Barber of Fleet Street.” The repetition and variation of this song throughout the performance, with the titular hook line “Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street,” connotes the various ways in which history and legend meld into each other through repetition-with-a-difference and various modes of artistic and musical representation. In the opening song, various members step forward to sing the song and a chorus forms from various fictionalized historical actors associated with Sweeney Todd. Overall, the songs throughout the musical create an aestheticization of violence and horror, a stylized slice of history/legend mixture that cuts through time to bring spectators into a safe, mediated space of observation.

In *Festen*, the music serves as modes of cover-up and as the policing of zones of psychological safety amidst the surfacing of personal histories of trauma that link to larger histories of racism. For instance, when Gbatokai, Helene’s African American boyfriend, appears at the party, he is initially treated as an invading presence, though he mentioned repeatedly that he was invited. When Michael first meets Gbatokai, he pushes him out and attacks him, asking him “What do you want?” and arguing “I think you’ve come to the wrong place” while emphasizing “This is a private party” (II ii).

Micheal's comments thus reflect a desire for clearly-delineated borders of inside/outside and public/private. At first, Michael can only conceive of this African American as a musician, patronizingly remarking "Hang on a minute, just a minute, we don't need any music. No band tonight, mate. You'll have to go home" (II ii). Music thus defines home and away/foreign, the familiar space of the family and threats to that space. When Gbatokai aligns himself sympathetically with Christian's plight and challenges Michael, Mette taps her glass and sings a peaceful song in Danish: "There is idyllic peace in the lonely woods/And the longing of the heart ceases here/Where peace and resting are/Hear the church bells ring in the evening calm/The robin's last chirps before he dozes off/By the lake a frog croaks loudly/As the fog rolls over field and stream" (II ii). While a peaceful song, the reference to the forest resonates with Christian as he is later tied to a tree in the woods near the inn and beaten by Michael and some of the other guests—an attempt to keep him outside the space of the celebration, outside of conscious awareness.

Later, when Gbatokai again aligns himself with Christian against Michael and the forces of repression, toasting "Here's to your brother," Michael taunts him to make a speech of his own and then the 'insider' family and friends loudly sing a blatantly racist song, reminiscent of the loudly-croaking frogs in the forest. Michael leads the group in loudly singing "*an old Danish children's song which is used as a racist taunt*" (II ii). While in the film Gbatokai spoke only English, when the film is translated here the audience must imaginatively believe that the cast speaks in Danish most of the time. The question of language barriers becomes foregrounded in a moment where, if one has seen the film, the shift to all-English in the performance seems at first 'not to work,' as several students commented. However, the racist song and its lyrics foreground the question of

language and misunderstanding of what one says, even if it is in one's native tongue, such as the rest of the party not at first understanding or acknowledging what Christian had to say. The racist song goes, "I've seen a little sambo man/With a face as black as a frying pan/He said so many funny thins/And in his nose was a great big ring/He laughed at me and said these words/And I didn't understand a single thing/Hullah hut hottentot/Hulla hopsa sambo man" (II ii). In the space after "said these words," Gbatokai interjects "fuck you" as a speaking back, as protest. While Helene explains "It's a fucking racist song," Gbatokai replies "I know what it is!" even though he may not understand all of the Danish words completely. This question of language, translation and understanding becomes even more poignant since the English-speaking audience of the play literally understands all of the words.

Similarly, this push-to-the-outside move occurs as the family and friends dance around and sing "It's Daddy's Birthday" in a mode of exuberant, festive desperation as a way of shutting out Christian's call to recognize and "understand a single thing" of the abuse of his childhood that contributed to his sister's suicide:

It's Daddy's birthday

Oh yes it is and it is today

It's Daddy's birthday

Oh yes it is and it is today

And now you'll hear how loud we whistle

And now you'll hear how loud we whistle

This loud singing and dancing on the table tops, the second singing of the song in the play, tries to drown out the voice of Christian and his proclamation of truth at the table. The dancing on top of the table thus tries to dominate, overshadow and move above Christian's story. Thus, rather than the two levels of the underground kitchen and the main stage, a third level of space emerges here on the table tops, perhaps an embodiment of psychological repression or conscious suppression, repetition distraction by the conscious mind to keep down the lower surfacing of traumatized voices deep within the psyche. Else's final line of the play, "I'll stay here," accentuates the creation of the space of home, here and now—a space now redefined and transformed as the scourge and plague of the trauma is cast out in the form of Helge, though this purgative move only gestures towards the possibility of resolution after a disruption.

In the acrobatic *Romeo and Juliet* and the David Farr direction of *Julius Caesar*, music serves to disrupt several moments and create forms of potential defamiliarization for the audience of the play while in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, music instead sets the tone of the historical context and yet similarly plays with some of the themes of the play. The cheesy lounge-singing Paris becomes a perfectly unattractive comic foil for Romeo and amplifies the carnivalesque atmosphere of the production before the tragic finale. When the Jesus crucifix starts to play guitar and sing in the church and is then joined by the rest of the cast in a rousing version of "Love is in the Air" just before the interval, this last burst of music, comedy and clowning seems to make way for the turn towards tragedy in the last sections of the play. The singing crucifix becomes a moment of delightful surprise, much like when Cinna the poet in the Swan Theatre's production of *Julius Caesar* suddenly comes down, after being raised and hung in a crucifix style pose

high up in the air, and his corpse/ghost begins to sing a cabaret-style song about war, soon joined by two of the female soldiers who are dressed in camouflage. Rather than acting merely as comic relief, this moment of bizarre defamiliarization adds resonance to the circus of power and carnage in the play as well as draws attention to the role of poets, artists and musicians—who seem to be forever cast on the margins of military operations but who voiced protest during objections in the 1960s and 1970s over the Vietnam War. Cinna dances the dance of death in which all of the characters of *Julius Caesar* participate.

In *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, the jazz music and dance interludes served to set the tone and aesthetic of the fast life of youth-oriented culture of the 1920s and 1930s, with dances such as the Lindy Hop set against the New York City skyline. The motif of dancing and partner-switching also works well into the themes of the play, where Proteus dances with Julia and then decides he wants to switch partners and dance with his friend Valentine's partner, Silvia. As Dr. Peck argued in the seminar, the quick motions of the dances parallel the fast society and, I would add, the very movements of the dances themselves mirror the issue of partners, motion and both social and romantic mobility as Proteus, Valentine and Sir Thurio all vie for Silvia's affection.

Props and Lighting

Two Gentlemen of Verona is one of the productions where props and lighting were not merely functional but resonated with elements of plot, character, setting, and themes—a situation akin to other plays, including: *Festen*, *A Doll's House*, *Solid God Cadillac*, *Sweeney Todd*, *The Mandate*, *Julius Caesar*, *The History Boys*, *By the Bog of Cats*, *Fix-Up* and *His Dark Materials*.

The two letters in the Swan Theatre's production of *Two Gentleman of Verona* link in various ways to letters used as props in other plays we saw while in London. In *Two Gentleman of Verona*, the love letter that Proteus sends to Julia in Act I serves as a great source of amusement as she tears it up in front of her maid in Lucetta and then, in private, tries to piece it back together, ecstatic that Proteus loves her. As Dr. Peck noted in the seminar, this ambivalent relationship to the letter reflects her tension within a role as love object within love traditions, where she is not supposed to receive the *billet-doux*, and her desire to move out of that mold. Thus, within the play, there is a conflict between Julia's desires and how she feels she must appear to others, and this tension also meta-dramatically draws attention to dramatic, romantic and poetic traditions which *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* references. I would add that the prop of the 'sweet letter' also serves to embody the motif of fragmentation, tearing and reconstruction involved in both the friend and romantic relationships of the play, namely the sundering and piecing together again of the friendship between Valentine and Proteus over Silvia. Ultimately, Julia's forgiveness of Proteus, after Valentine forgives him, allows the original romantic pairs to be restored. Julia's staged performance of the refusal of the letter thus parallels

Valentine's situation, for he desires Silvia but must follow his desires in private only since her father does not approve of the match.

Even more humorous than the scene with Julia and the letter is perhaps is the letter Valentine writes to himself on behalf of Silvia, which she wishes were "writ more movingly." Silvia wants to express love for Valentine, yet only he possesses the necessarily poetic skill and familiarity with the traditions of love courtship to accomplish the task deftly. As with Proteus's love letter to Julia, there is a sense that the prop of the letter stands in a delicate tension between the expectations of love traditions, the 'proper courtship procedures,' and how *Two Gentlemen of Verona* both alludes to and plays off of those traditions. In this way, the letter stands in for larger courtship dynamics of the play, where Valentine has not followed the 'proper' courtship procedure by trying to elope with Silvia via a rope ladder in the middle of the night instead of winning the approval of her father. At the same time, much like the rivalry between Proteus and Valentine, the lack of love's 'true course' ever running smoothly plays into dramatic and poetic traditions of the Medieval and Renaissance period upon which *Two Gentlemen* draws. This tradition later includes Shakespeare's own *Romeo and Juliet*. *Two Gentlemen of Verona* reworks earlier plays such as perhaps *The Boke named the Governour* (1531), which adapted a part of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, *Diana Enamorada* by Jorge de Montemayor (c. 1559) as well as Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* and one of its sources, Boccaccio's *Il Teseida delle nozze d'Emelia* (*The Story of Theseus concerning the Nuptials of Emily*).

While also functioning in a comic vein, the letters in *Solid Gold Cadillac* that Laura Partridge exchanges with stockholders around the country also act as decisive

turning points in the plot, since they develop a relationship with the stockholders that ultimately gives her the power of their vote by proxy, allowing her to take control of the company. The letters also reflect a counterpoint to the often cold and distant relationships within capitalism in the name of the bottom line of maximum profits. The story is not just a Cinderella story, as the narration suggests, but also a David and Goliath one, as the owner of a few stocks ends up running the company and downing the corporate giants through the slingshot of genuine attention to all of the ‘little people’ who make up the shareholders. The write-in proxy forms also serve as a humorous visual joke as stacks and stacks of paper on carts are brought from the mail room.

In *Festen* and *A Doll’s House*, the letters also act as decisive elements of the plot, yet in these two plays the tone is melancholic and dramatic rather than comic. In *Festen*, Linda’s letter, a suicide note addressed “To the person who finds this letter,” eventually surfaces at the birthday party. Christian urges Helene to read it out loud to all of the guests. The letter is a turning point in the plot—decisive evidence that Christian is telling the truth. The staging of the letter discovery is interesting, as Pia finds it in a tube of headache tablets that she has gone for fetch for Helene, who had stashed it away there. There is thus an association between the mind/head and pain that is brought on and purged to some extent by the shocking corroboration of the suicide note. Linda, too, in her note implies that she is looking for a movement to escape psychological torment and pain, hoping that “it will be lovely on the other side” (III iii).

While I did not see the production of Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* at the Greenwich Playhouse because I was at *Playboy of the West Indies*, the prop of Krogstad’s letter that exposes Nora’s forgery of her father’s signature on the promissory note for the loan plays

a central role in the play. As Krogstad blackmails Nora with exposure if she does not convince Torvald not to fire him at the bank (for forgery, it turns out), Nora becomes horrified that Torvald will leave her when the truth comes out. However, when Torvald does read the letter, he calls her a liar and hypocrite, she leaves him, even though Krogstad (now with Kristine) sends the promissory note along with another letter. The letter thus acts as a plot device that causes suspense through the play but also exposes in more naked form Nora's underlying doubts about her treatment as a doll by Torvald. Thus, the letter, akin to *Festen*, more definitively causes an acknowledgment of a situation that had been going on for years. The letters in *Festen* and *A Doll's House* act as a message delayed, a truth that takes circuitous routes to arrive at its final destination.

Props of a different sort play a central role in various jokes with *The Mandate*, although these prop-jokes function as part of playwright Nikolai Erdman's intricately-designed plot machinery. Quite appropriately, the production at the Cottesloe Theatre drew attention to props even before the opening scene. The performance began with a bare stage and then, to the accompaniment of zany, carnivalesque music, the actors came on stage with clownish mannerisms carrying various props and pieces of the set. The prop of the double-sided picture, with Karl Marx on one side and "Copenhagen Twilight" on the other, creates a humorous conversation between Pavel and his 'Mummy' about how one should appear under the new communist regime. The painting also links to the motif of double-sidedness amongst the characters in the play. For instance, Olymp Valerianovich Smetanich is a merchant who wants to make friends with communists for bureaucratic reasons while he secretly mourns for the return of the imperial order. Pavel pretends to be a communist of high standing so Olymp Valerianovich's son, Valerian,

will agree to marry Pavel's sister Varvara Sergeevna. Meanwhile, homeless street musicians come in to perform a certain 'proletarian authenticity' for communist guests to prove Pavel's 'authentic' link to 'the people' and so forth. This motif of doubling, what one pretends to be versus one's actual leanings, resonates with the uncertainty of social roles in a time of sociopolitical change. As John Freedman writes in the introduction to the playscript:

These are people whose sense of self has been wiped out utterly by a faceless and momentous social upheaval. Stripped of the reality which has given them shape and substance as individuals, they frantically seek, though the power of imagination and the instinct of panic, to establish new ones into which, perhaps, they may be able to fit. (xiii)

The deception, mis-timings, mistakes in judgment and mistaken identities make for wonderful broad comedy and also resonate with questions of social recognition and status within a transformed social order—hence the lamentation by Pavel that ends the play, where he can't even get arrested: "God Almighty, if they won't arrest us, how can we live, Mummy? How can we live?"

Indeed, the question of God and faith links to the other painting Pavel's mother wants to hang, titled "In Thee, Oh Lord I Trust." The official atheistic stance of the communist regime affects not only how one acts and lives under the new social order but also influences where one puts faith, which now becomes a private, hidden part of domestic life rather than public spectacle. Likewise, the gun that Anastasia Nikolaevna sits on makes for great comedy as she cannot move from the chair and must be covered

with a sheet when guests arrive. Figuratively, the gun also connotes the tense political climate, where the old regime (symbolized by the dress of “Anastasia”) is simply ‘covered up’ and citizens are unsure about actions that may ‘set off’ the new authorities. The dress, while playing a large role in the mistake of the maid/cook for a returned Anastasia, imperial royalty, also implies that authority and leadership are role-playing with costumes and scripts—roles which the maid/cook “Nastia” has learned to play from pulp fiction romances.

The prop of the “rather dangerous chest” perhaps invokes Nastia’s bosom, which incites both Ivan’s desire and, while she in the dress, inflames a desire for the old order. Meanwhile, the wooden chest serves various uses in the plot twists and comedy of the play, such as storing the infamous dress that belonged to the former Empress Alexandra Federovna. Tamara Leopoldovna asks Pavel’s mother Nadejda Petrovna to look after the dress for her, claiming that “In this tiny chest lies all that remains of Russia in Russia” (I). Tamara asks, “whoever’s going to save Russia these days, Nadejda Petrovna, if it isn’t you or me?” (I). The chest, in which “Nastia” becomes locked wearing the dress, thus comes to symbolize a repository of nostalgia for the old order and the hopes for its recovery. As Olymp Valerianovich describes, “I saw it myself, with my own eyes. Just here. Right on this spot. I saw our dear beloved Motherland, our true and authentic Mother Russia rise like a phoenix, out of the chest” (III).

However, because it is only the maid/cook Nastia whom they are describing, and it is Ivan Ivanovich who is actually inside the chest at this point, the notion of a “true and authentic” identity or political system for the country comes into question. In some ways, though, Nastia *is* an ‘authentic’ member of the working class—one who cleans and cooks

but fantasizes of being an aristocrat, much like Pavel entertains dreams of being a high-ranking communist. Indeed, the play equally satirizes the notion of “true and authentic” proletarians as Pavel hires jobless, homeless street people to play the role of proletarian connections for him in exchange for liquor and appetizers. Ivan charges Pavel with being an “imposter,” not a “true communist” (III). As Pavel’s mandate turns out to be a forgery, Olymp Valerianovich laments that everything is unreal: “That’s it! It’s all over. It’s all ruined. Everyone’s a fake. She’s a fake, he’s a fake, maybe even we’re fakes as well” (III). Along with self-reflexive metadrama here, since the lines are in a play with props and costumes, there is the conundrum of what is true and authentic in the new social order when the very terms by which “true” and “authentic” are defined have shifted. The shifting roles of the chest and its connection to the themes and characters in the play epitomizes the multiple levels at which props can operate as links between the action of the play and the larger socio-political context.

Akin to the chest in *The Mandate*, the coffin prop in *Sweeney Todd* takes on various functions within both the plot and the visual aesthetic of the performance, yet the coffin also grounds the musical in the motif of death that runs throughout the work. The set was very small and stationary, plank boards mimicking the inside of a coffin perhaps, and a coffin the center of the stage acted in various functions. In the opening scene, during the “Ballad of Sweeney Todd,” a body is lowered into the coffin and then emerges to sing: the body of Sweeney Todd. The story thus begins after Todd’s own death and then all of the characters sing and narrate the tale of Sweeney Todd. Resonant with Linda’s letter in *Festen*, there is a sense that the ghosts of the dead are speaking/singing here. The lid of the coffin turns around and becomes a small stage through the

production, or the raised platform upon which Sweeney Todd ‘takes care’ of his customers. The set takes the form of planks with striking red light and smoke underneath, implying Hell and damnation, and a bath of red light overhead as Sweeney Todd slits the throats of his victims. The play represents the act of killing as a slitting gesture, a whistle blown, red liquid (stage blood) poured into a bucket and the bath of blood red light. The straight razor prop, of course, takes on significance in the performance as both an agent of aesthetics, beauty, shaving and a device of death. Likewise, the cutlass in *Playboy of the West Indies* is both a tool of harvesting, cultivation, farming and productivity as well as a weapon of violence.

While the striking shock of the red light in *Sweeney Todd* linked thematically to blood, violence and death, the hanging fluorescent lights used in *Julius Caesar* and *The History Boys* created different kinds of moods. The flickering fluorescent lights in *Julius Caesar* coincided with the bursts of mechanical sounds and brought to mind the staging of modern warfare both on the battlefield and in the administrative offices of governments. In *The History Boys*, the rows upon rows of hanging fluorescent lights connoted an oppressive institutionality and bureaucratization of education as well as the cold, sterile atmospheres of hospitals. In *By the Boy of Cats*, the lighting was decidedly atmospheric and haunting, often mimicking moonlight—a mood that resonated well with the liminal space of the play between dramatic realism and pure myth. The moon also alluded perhaps to the changeability of fate and questions of constancy or inconstancy of character.

At the National Theatre, our tour allowed us access to the prop workshops, including a close-up look at the books from *Fix-Up* and a daemon from *His Dark*

Materials. We discovered that all of the books on the massive shelves of the *Fix-Up* set were simulated versions of ones appropriate to the shop, though often only simulated covers due to copyright laws. In the program booklet for *Fix-Up*, playwright Kwane Kwei-Armah discusses the history of Black Philosophy with Dr. Robert Beckford and Dr. William (Lez) Henry. The three men discuss important Black intellectuals and activists, and at the end of their discussion, there is a list of other books that appear in *Fix-Up* bookstore. The book selection is thus not merely an attempt to create an ‘authentic’ set but a systematic thinking-through of a particular intellectual tradition in relation to both the character of Brother Kiyi and the larger set of topics with which the play engages, such as the place of Black intellectuals within various cultural traditions and the recovery of various lost voices in historical narratives. The props here are thus imbued with meaning and are central to the explorations of the play, much like the props of the daemons in *His Dark Materials* link to the qualities of each character and take on a life of their own as actors dressed in black voice and move the puppets alongside the live actors. The daemon prop becomes filled with meaning during the play’s performance since the daemon embodies a certain flux that ‘settles’ during sexual maturity. Hence the daemon serves as a kind of guide and friend in the dis-orientations of identity shifts over time.

The alethiometer, the device of symbols which Lyra learns to read, is a key prop that links to questions of navigation both physical and psychological within innocence and experience. As the Master explains to Lyra in Act I:

It tells the truth. But it does so in a way so deep and so mysterious that adults need a whole library of reference books to understand it.

Lyra: What about children?

Master: Who can say? Innocence can be wiser than experience. If you could read it, Lyra, even if only a very little, it would be the greatest treasure you every possessed. Respect it. Keep it safe. Tell no one you have it.

The theme of telling the truth, of course, links back to ‘Lyra the liar’ and the function of myth storytelling as a form of deception in the service of greater truths. The prop of Will’s knife functions plotwise as cutting and sealing windows between the parallel universes and figuratively as connoting storytelling and imagination as windows to other worlds in which one can visit but not live. At the end of the play, Will must break the knife in order to stabilize the balance among the universes. Balthamos says to him that “It will be the work of a lifetime to close them all. But you must do what’s right, even after you have lost the one you love. Now break the knife” (II). To break the knife, Will must think of “what is most important to” him, then “try to cut”(II). Thus, the breaking of the knife seals him off from Lyra, the person who is most important to him. If the knife props functions as a metaphor for fictionality and imagination, then perhaps the concluding thought of the play, “You must be where you are,” implies a certain relationship between the ‘internal’ world of theatre and literature versus the ‘external’ world of cultural and politics. There is a mutual interpenetration of the two spheres, yet the imagination of utopia or escape and salvation through storytelling must not, in the end, take the place of navigating political agency while fighting for ‘real world’ change.

After my own attempts to navigate the physical space of London and the plays I saw during my short visit, the playscripts and syllabus serve as maps for both understanding and memory of my theatre trip. Reading live performances must take into account their text as well as all of the aspects of staging as they connect to topics, themes and motifs. By the time I left, I felt fairly comfortable with many of the ‘tube’ lines and connections and began some of the intersecting trains of thought that make up this informal journal. It is only in hindsight that many of these connections become apparent, and the various rough threads I have traced in this journal only follow through with some of the possibilities for reflection that will emerge in the subways of my imagination in the future. Before I start making any more corny analogies, I’d better stop here and thank you, Dr. Peck, for a wonderful time in London. I got along very well with my roommate, Geoff, and we had many interesting conversations in our room about the plays and life in general. I also enjoyed spending time with the undergraduates, the Master’s student, Brenna. I was also thrilled to revisit London and see an old friend of mine who now lives there. Sincerely, I had a thoroughly enjoyable and educational trip. Given the chance, I would gladly do it again sometime.

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