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Monika Pietrzak-Franger, Eckart Voigts-Virchow (eds.)

Adaptations –
Performing across Media and Genres
Contemporary Drama in English

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Papers given on the occasion of the seventeenth annual conference of the German Society for Contemporary Theatre and Drama in English

Edited for the society by Monika Pietrzak-Franger and Eckart Voigts-Virchow
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In a very real sense, every live staging of a printed play could theoretically be considered an adaptation in its performance (Hutcheon 39).

Linda Hutcheon’s passing remark in arguably the most important book within the recent spate of work that has re-invigorated an ailing adaptation studies, raises interesting theoretical questions. Although hybridity is inevitable in the ‘actualizations’ of theatre performance and we may, therefore, posit an innate intertwining of theatre and adaptation, we habitually only refer to performances as ‘stage adaptations’ when a significant intertext is visible in the context of the performance – that is: when a theatre performance is supposed to be overtly intertextual or intermedial – and when the performance is tied to a palpable, overt “source” and “adaptors” rather than to the ‘original’ and ‘authors.’ As many of the essays collected in this volume show, however, the seemingly clear status of an adaptation becomes multi-dimensional upon closer inspection.

The posterior, even derivative character of drama and theatrical performance encapsulated by the terms ‘after’ or even ‘afterings’ has been acknowledged and highlighted by many theatre scholars. Helen Ed-
mundson offers historical evidence of this connection: “Shakespeare plundered other people’s stories shamelessly. And people didn’t say, ‘That’s not a play, it’s an adaptation’” (qtd. in Logan). The term ‘adaptation’ has gained in critical stature as academia has become more sensitive to multifarious ‘palimpsestuous,’ ‘impure’ and ‘hybrid’ aesthetic practices. A recent collection on Intermediality in Theatre and Performance starts from the assumption that “intermediality is associated with the blurring of generic boundaries, crossover and hybrid performances, intertextuality, intermediality, hypermediality and self-conscious reflexivity” (Chapple and Kattenbelt 11). It follows from this blurring of boundaries that performative modes are increasingly present in other media and genres, and, in view of ubiquitous audio-visual media networks probably even more so, that other media and genres are increasingly present in stage performances. Adaptive processes have recently gained in number and importance and spawned new terms such as “remediation” (Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin) to account for the interplay between new digital media and older media (that is, for example, theatre). In spite of a few notable exceptions – such as Chapple and Kattenbelt’s collection – adaptative processes have too infrequently become the focus of attention in theatre studies. By addressing issues of adaptation in performance studies, therefore, we fill a gap both in adaptation studies and in theatre studies.

As a consequence of this increasing performative hybridity our – by no means complete – list of examples of media and generic transference does not feature neat, one-to-one transpositions but rather diverse processes of “multilamination” (Hutcheon 6) and palimpsestuous layering, as products of a multi-referential and multi-textual web.

Most interestingly, screen-to-stage adaptation has been in vogue in recent years – arguably at the expense of ‘new’ and ‘original’ playwriting. Registering the chagrin of playwrights such as Alan Ayckbourn and Michael Frayn, a recent Independent article wonders at this popularity of Hollywood productions in the London West End (cf. Johnson) – citing shows based on movie classics such as the Hitchcock adaptation The 39 Steps and David Lean’s Brief Encounter. The report claims that risk-cutting, ‘branding’ as well as an emergence of ‘cine-literate’ directors, can account for the film remake’s conquest of British stages. While
musical revisions have proved the most prolific adaptation genre in the past four years, with the re-workings of such films as *Dirty Dancing*, *Footloose* or *Billy Elliot*, theatre also appropriated other filmic genres, e.g. comedies (*Kinky Boots, Calendar Girls*), dramas (*All about My Mother, The Graduate, Rain Man*), or anime (*Sailor Moon*). Dance and opera adaptations of cinematic productions have also been flourishing: while Giorgio Battistelli has been commissioned to adapt Al Gore’s *An Inconvenient Truth* for the 2011 season at Milan’s La Scala, Matthew Bourne has offered a successful re-working of *Edward Scissorhands*. Theatre has also found a burgeoning source of inspiration in television. Stage revisions of sitcoms such as *‘Allo ‘Allo*, *The Addams Family, Dad’s Army, Hello, Francesca* or *Happy Days* have attracted whole families and, in particular, male audiences by providing a fresh coagulation of themes and protagonists (cf. Thorpe).

Literary texts have also been an object of adaptation, with, especially, the nineteenth-century novel as a persistent source or reference. Stage revisions of *The Mill on the Floss* (Helen Edmundson/Shared Experience), *Pride and Prejudice* (Helen Jerome, St James’s Theatre, 1936; *First Impressions* – a 1959 musical version), *The Woman in White* or *Dracula* (e.g. Liz Lochhead 1998), continue to attract audiences by their combination of familiarity and novelty. Thus, for instance, Bryony Lavery’s *Dracula* offers an eclectic intermedia spectacle, embedded in new technologies of mass communication, and integrating topical mass-cultural references to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. James Joyce’s *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* have also been dramatized: while the former underwent a postmodernist appropriation at the hands of Dermot Bolger (*A Dublin Bloom*, 1994, Zellerbach Theatre, Pennsylvania), the latter was directed by Barbara Vann for the Medicine Show Theatre Ensemble in 2005.

Contemporary literature is also a frequent source of stage adaptation – from the 2002 stage version of Jeanette Winterson’s *The PowerBook* to, for instance, *Lucky You*, a dramatization of Carl Hiaasen’s novel, which premiered at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2008, or Joan Didion’s *The Year of Magical Thinking*, which was successfully translated for a Broadway show by David Hare.

More infrequently, but with particular theoretical allure, adaptations of the visual arts have also appeared on theatrical stages. Stephen
Sondheim and James Lapine’s *Sunday in the Park with George*, 1984, is an intriguing take on Seurat’s pointillism. Shelagh Stephenson’s works, such as *An Experiment with an Air Pump* and *Mappa Mundi*, find their inspiration in Joseph Wright’s *An Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump* and cartographic material respectively, while Edward Bond’s *Bingo* stages a fusion of Rembrandt’s drawings. (New) visual technologies have also been appropriated by performative strategies. From Bill Talen’s televangelist Reverend Billy to the Billionaires for Bush, political groups have become renowned for their critical use of the media format, rhetoric and aesthetics of public campaigning. At the 2006 Edinburgh Festival Fringe audiences were confronted with an adaptation of *Baghdad Burning*, an Iraqi woman’s blog, staged by Six Figures Theatre Company from New York.

Yet another sub-genre of English drama has evolved around the adaptation of historical texts – often in the context of so-called verbatim plays and the tradition of documentary drama\(^1\) – and the staging of historical events. In this field, the range of themes and contexts is breathtaking, from the dramatization of the Nuremberg Trials (Richard Norton-Taylor’s *Nuremberg: The War Crimes Trial*, 1996; Abby Mann’s *The Judgement at Nuremberg*, 2006), to the Palestine conflict (the editing and staging of the eponymous American activist’s e-mails in *My Name is Rachel Corrie*, 2005), post 9/11 issues (Victoria Brittain, Gillian Slovo, *Guantanamo: Honour Bound to Defend Freedom*; Robin Soams, *Talking to Terrorists*; David Hare, *Stuff Happens*) or the 1977 television debate between David Frost and Richard Nixon (*Frost/Nixon*, recently adapted from the Donmar Warehouse production for a movie version). Also, historical personae have been adapted to the stage in the successful sub-genre of the bio-play, from Howard Brenton’s takes on Percy Shelley (*Bloody Poetry*, 1984) or Harold Macmillan (*Never So Good*, 2008), via Timberlake Wertenbaker’s *After Darwin* (1988) and Liz Lochhead’s *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off* (1989) to

Michael Frayn’s foray into German politics and the life of Willy Brandt (*Democracy*, 2003). More recently, Roger Guenveur Smith’s one man show about the black activist Huey Newton (first performed at the New York Shakespeare Festival) was so successful that it was followed by Spike Lee’s video adaptation of the play. The history of theatre and performance has also become a subject of a number of adaptations where intra-theatrical exchanges have offered interesting instances of generic transpositions, as is the case with musicals *Rent* (1996) and *Miss Saigon* (1989), which were based on operas (*La Bohème* and *Madame Butterfly* respectively).

Despite this ubiquity of adaptations, there has been a certain resistance to studying them as “adaptations,” which is partly related to implicit reservations against adaptive work, and a bias towards the problematic idea of originality. The propensity of adaptation to blur aesthetic categories is another major reason why adaptations were eschewed by serious criticism (Elliott 133). Robert Stam identifies further factors behind the prejudice against adaptation, which include the “valorization of historical anteriority and seniority,” whereby the adapted text is regarded as superior to its adaptation, as well as “iconophobia” and “logophilia,” which establish generic and media hierarchies, thus maintaining the high/low art divide (Stam 2005 4-6). Animosity and a feeling of an inherent inferiority of adaptations resulted in a profoundly moralistic character of adaptation criticism (Stam 3; Cartmell et al., “Introduction” 1), which often took form of subjective, qualitative interpretations (Stam 4; Cardwell 32). This, in turn, impinged both upon the “content” and “form” of adaptation studies (Cardwell 32). Additionally, “Academia’s institutional history” very much contributed to the problem of recognizing adaptation studies as a separate discipline, as Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan make clear in their introduction to the first issue of the journal *Adaptations* in 2008 (1).

Prejudice against adaptation has also been reflected in the critical jargon which has often emphasized the derivative character of adaptation and underlined its dependence and harmful influence on the original. Terms such as “parasitism,” “violation,” “betrayal,” “vulgarization” (Cartmell et al., “Introduction” 2), vampirism (Hutcheon 176) or
“cannibalization” (Stam 25) have effectively maintained negative connotations, with which adaptation has been associated within orthodox fidelity criticism. The demand for fidelity still ghosts adaptation studies (Leitch, “Adaptation Studies” 64), despite countless attempts of contemporary theorists to reject it. While some point out the fruitlessness of classificatory efforts based on the criterion of fidelity (e.g. Leitch, “Adaptation Studies” 65), Stam decidedly claims the “undesirability,” and virtual impossibility of literal fidelity in adaptation, due to medium change (17). According to him, the transposition from a single-track medium (such as the novel) to a multi-track medium (such as film) makes fidelity to the original impossible due to “semiotic differences” as well as technological, commercial and budgetary constraints (17). Altogether, contemporary criticism endeavours to leave behind the spectre of fidelity, and take a stance which would enable a more positive analysis of the processes and products of adaptation.

Recent book and journal publications as well as conferences show that, as Thomas Leitch asserts in “Adaptation Studies at a Crossroads”, “[a]fter years of being stuck in the backwaters of the academy, adaptation studies is on the move” (63). In addition to a spate of new journals (Adaptation, Oxford University Press; Adaptation in Film and Performance, Intellect), current issues in adaptation studies have brought forth a number of monographs and collections2 that do away with fidelity criticism, offer a number of fruitful approaches that overcome the evaluative skirmishes or typological frenzy of traditional adaptation

studies\textsuperscript{3} and, instead, open up new vistas of coming to terms with generic and media hybridity.

In fact, the spectrum of problems addressed in individual papers collected here goes beyond the question of coherent classification of stage adaptations. As the contributors to this volume come from a variety of disciplines and use an assortment of methods, the following section offers a brief account of chief methodologies in adaptation studies.

In her categorization of contemporary methods used in adaptation studies, Cardwell distinguishes between medium-specific, comparative and pluralistic approaches (43). The first set of medium-specific theories highlights the uniqueness of the intrinsic nature of each medium and the idiosyncratic modes of expression which it generates (Cardwell 44). Although this approach does not demand faithfulness to the original but rather to medium-specific traits, it has proved unsatisfactory for the exploration of “equivalence” in adaptation” (Cardwell 73). Nonetheless, it can be supportive in close textual analysis, which focuses on the peculiarities of a chosen medium.\textsuperscript{4}

The second, comparative, approach has been judged more adequate in the study of adaptation, as it offers an effective link between the concept of adaptation, and the methods used for its analysis (Cardwell 54). Drawing upon narrative and semiotic theories, it considers how different (media) conventions alter the same narrative and how “non-transferable aspects” of one medium can be expressed in another (Cardwell 56). The value of the comparative approach lies in its bringing together a variety of media and genres, which, despite their individual traits, are all engaged in telling stories. Its drawbacks, Cardwell and Stam agree, come from the neglect of the context of adaptation – its socio-

\textsuperscript{3} Complex typologies of adaptation are legion and, while they ought to be viewed with critical reservations, they are often useful. Thus, for instance, Kamilla Elliott has offered a classificatory model rooted in the form/content dyad, distinguishing six adaptation concepts – psychic, ventriloquist, genetic, de(re)composing, incarnational and trumping (133-183).

\textsuperscript{4} See, for instance, Cardwell’s work on television adaptation as opposed to film adaptation.
cultural, historical, institutional, generic, etc. embedding (Cardwell 65-73; Stam 41).

This contextualization of adapted texts is particularly important for the pluralist approach of Erica Sheen, Deborah Cartmell, Imelda Whelehan et. al. Cartmell and Whelehan validate their methodology by maintaining that “[a] cultural studies approach foregrounds the activities or reception and consumption, and shelves – forever perhaps – consideration of the aesthetic or cultural worthiness of the object of study” (Adaptations 18). To the cultural studies approach to adaptation, it is not only the text/medium that is important but also its socio-cultural, ideological, and political dependencies. Likewise, contemporary theorists recognize the significance of intertextuality to the discussion of adaptation. Intertextuality has been a major framework of reference in the theories of adaptation offered by Robert Stam, Julie Sanders and Linda Hutcheon, who see it as a way of bypassing traditional valorisation and aesthetic hierarchies within adaptation studies. Hutcheon’s A Theory of Adaptation brings together various generic and media examples which expand the traditional novel/film debate, thus offering a fertile background for the discussions of, among others, stage adaptations. The appeal of her book is clearly visible in many papers in this collection.

Hutcheon’s dynamic theoretical background (formalist-semiotics, poststructuralism, intertextuality studies, etc. xii) and thematic orientation offer a platform for a more comprehensive study of adaptation. She recognizes the “[d]ouble nature of adaptations” (6), which Thomas Leitch eloquently summarizes in his review of the book:

Hutcheon defines it [adaptation] alternatively as a creative process and, in parallel with Sanders, as a receptive process whereby adaptations are recognized and enjoyed as adaptations by audiences who are constantly invited to shift back and forth between their experience of a new story and their memory of its progenitors. (Leitch, “Adaptation Studies” 74)

This recognition of the “double nature” of adaptation – as process and product – allows Hutcheon to position it within a specific context, put it in relation to a gamut of (economic, political, legal etc.) motivations, and define the modes of audience engagement with it. The three modes that she introduces – telling (novels, short stories), showing (perform-
ance media), interacting (videogames, theme parks) (Hutcheon xiv) – are to varying degrees ‘immersive’ and neither of them is ‘passive’ in the sense that audiences engage imaginatively, cognitively and emotionally with the texts – even if the participatory or interacting mode requires a different kind of physical activity (cf. Hutcheon 22-24).

Each mode of engagement then is related to various kinds and degrees of the audience’s interaction with the text as well as to their different temporal and spatial experiences, not to mention the range of critical traditions they are exposed to (Hutcheon 128-136). This emphasis on the modes of engagement allows Hutcheon to accentuate connections between a variety of media, to highlight the complexity of what can be adapted, and to engage with the “what (forms), who (adapters), why (adapters), how (audiences), when (contexts), and where (contexts) of adaptation” (xvi).

This pluralistic approach also permits her to define adaptations in positive terms, with reference to a distinction made by Roland Barthes between ‘texts’ and ‘works,’ where the former are regarded as chambers of echoes, filled with citations and references. Impurity becomes an asset with these rich, “‘palimpsestuous’ works, haunted at all times by their adapted texts” (Hutcheon 6). The musical metaphor of ‘stereophony’ that Hutcheon (6) adapts from Barthes, is an example of a “kinetic vocabulary,” which Sanders calls for in her appeal for a new critical idiom in adaptation studies (38). She recognizes music and science as valuable sources of new positive terminology:

[M]usicology has proved a particularly helpful discipline, offering us templates and paradigms as diverse and suggestive as baroque variation on grounds and the riffs and improvisational qualities of jazz. Science, too, in particular the theories of adaptation expounded by Mendel, by Darwin, and by those who have deployed the theories of Crick and Watson, has provided an equally potent referential point (Sanders 155).

Stam also highlights the positive character of this nomenclature when he calls adaptation “an orchestration of discourses, talents, and tracks” (9), and when he re-interprets biological terms which have been used in the study of adaptation:

[I]f mutation is the means by which the evolutionary process advances, then we can also see filmic adaptations as “mutations” that help their source novel “sur-
vive.” Do not adaptations “adapt to” changing environments and changing tastes, as well as to a new medium, with its distinct industrial demands, commercial pressures, censorship taboos, and aesthetic norms? And are adaptations not a hybrid form like the orchid, the meeting place of a different “species”? (3)

This kinetic terminology offers another possibility of a positive definition of adaptation – adaptation as a (process of) interpretation and creation (Hutcheon 84). Rather than tracing meaning in the author as controller of validity, Hutcheon (111) emphasizes the liberating aspect of looking at adaptors as authors as well as readers – vicarious readers whose adaptations generate a new text specifically located at a point of intertextual engagement and materialize a moment of reader response and discursive negotiation. When we ‘read’ an adaptation, we read a text generated from yet another text by a reader/writer, or ‘wreader.’

The above-cited characterizations of adaptation may seem all-inclusive. And yet, despite this tendency to treat adaptation as an umbrella term, attempts have been made to limit the scope of its definition, and to distinguish it from such concepts as appropriation. Although still very tentative, these differentiations have been taken up in some of the papers collected here, and thus require a short introduction.

Julie Sanders’s Adaptation and Appropriation (2005) offers the most comprehensive discussion of the differentiation between adaptation and appropriation. She regards them both as sub-categories of intertextuality (17) and sees them as processes of performative, dialogic engagement with previous texts (4). While adaptation is understood in terms of transposition, commentary and analogue, appropriation is regarded as more critical towards and more loosely dependent on the adapted text: “Appropriation clearly extends far beyond the adaptation of other texts into new literary creations, assimilating both historical lives and events […] and companion art forms […] into the process” (Sanders 148). Thus, while West Side Story is an adaptation, as it has Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet at its core, it can also be regarded as an appropriation, since it reconsiders the terms of the adapted text (Sanders 28).

While Sanders’s differentiation is open to debate, there is no doubt that her work exemplifies the latest trend in adaptation studies – from the reverence of the original to the joyful and playful engagement with intertextuality. Her vocabulary, like the terminology used by other key figures in adaptation criticism, draws upon musicology and science to
unfold the complex character of adaptation processes. This recognition of the palimpsestuous character of adaptations, their complex dialogic nature and their creative engagement with the adapted text is celebrated in the majority of papers in this collection. Frequently they engage with multilaminated works that assign their audiences a task of looking back and forth.

The first section of this book, “Adapting Theatre History: Intratextuality,” brings together papers concerned with stage adaptations of theatre history. Graham Saunders’s “Under Redevelopment” focuses on the contextual, temporal transposition of a specific dramatic genre. Oscillating around such works as Barrie Keeffe’s *A Mad World My Masters* (1977), Caryl Churchill’s *Serious Money* (1987), and David Eldridge’s *Market Boy* (2006), it sketches a plethora of possibilities to re-write Jacobean City Comedy for contemporary British Theatre. Nicholas Wright’s play *Cressida* serves Lucia Krämer to unfold general questions related to intratextuality of this play in particular, and stage adaptations of theatre history in general. She argues that the play, apart from its meta-theatricality, addresses theoretical issues crucial to the practice of adaptation, such as the question of authorship, originality, fidelity or adaptation ethics. John Bull addresses translations/adaptations of Brecht’s work in Britain. More specifically, he traces the many afterlives of *Das Leben des Galilei*, first written in 1938/39 – afterlives given both by Brecht’s own translation (with Charles Laughton) and by subsequent British versions of the play. Bull covers theoretical ground that is also ploughed in the paper by Katja Krebs and Márta Minier. He argues that Howard Brenton’s, David Hare’s and David Edgar’s versions of the play work with material that in itself reflects constant ideological recontextualization on the part of Bertolt Brecht.

While the first section is concerned with the intratextuality of stage adaptations, the focus in the next one is on intertextual relations, attending to theatrical adaptations of literary works. The question implicit in John Bull’s essay, namely whether the processes of recontextualisation and translation involved in translating and adapting might be categorized, is more explicitly addressed in the contribution by Katja Krebs and Márta Minier. Discussing *The Blue Room*, David Hare’s ‘free’
adaptation of Schnitzler’s *Der Reigen*, as well as the stage version of Jeanette Winterson’s *The PowerBook*, Krebs and Minier contend that processes of adaptation and translation may contribute to subvert and transgress hegemonic and dominant notions of theatre performance. In “Playing the Novel,” Michael Fry jettisons the accusation of inferiority leveled at dramatisations of novels, and discusses the challenges of such generic transference. His practical work on the stage adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* offers a platform where he can rethink and redefine an effective methodology for theatre adaptations of literary works. Rather than methodological, the concern of Brigitte Bogar and Christopher Innes is historical in character. With reference to such musicals as *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolored Dreamcoat* and *Godspell*, they explore the tendencies in post-war revisions of the Bible within a specific theatrical genre. Their discussion highlights the significance of intertextuality in (critical) response to these works. Intertextuality also becomes the focal point of Davide Maschio’s discussion of Dermont Bolger’s dramatisation of Joyce’s *Ulysses*. According to him, Bolger’s *A Dublin Bloom*, through its postmodern reassessment of Joyce’s text, transfers to the stage the major preoccupations of Joyce’s work.

The following section, “Theatre and Other Media: Intermediality,” has at its core the dialogic relationship between theatre and other media as well as their technologies. Visual material and its incorporation in the works of Tom Stoppard (*After Magritte*), Shelagh Stephenson (*An Experiment with an Air Pump*, *Mappa Mundi*) and Edward Bond (*Bingo*) is the focus of Ewa Kęblowska-Ławniczak’s paper. For her, these particular re-workings of chosen paintings, maps and drawings testify to the creative character of adaptive process, which partakes of the aesthetics of recycling, and which results in suspending the power of the original. Also partly concerned with the critical assessment of the original by means of its adaptation, Beatrix Hesse’s “From Screen to Stage” focuses on the intermedial transfer from cinema to theatre. While providing a general discussion of the appeal and theoretical considerations of this transfer, the paper also offers a detailed discussion of a complex relationship between Alfred Hitchcock’s *The 39 Steps* and its stage version, with particular attention to the motif of severed hands and
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its role in the appraisal of the film. The objective of the next paper in this section goes beyond a simple discussion of the types of generic transposition. Rather, Pia Wiegmink’s “Performance meets Activism” inspects the forms of political criticism performed by the activist network Billionaires for Bush and their creative appropriation of the rhetoric and formats of political campaigns. Wiegmink scrutinizes in what ways this use of political campaigns and their media configurations (blogs, spots, websites) not only criticises electoral campaigns from within but also modifies political activism and its reception. While Kęblowska-Ławniczak, Hesse and Wiegmink concentrate on theatrical adaptations of other media formats, Anja Müller and Mark Schreiber explore the opposite direction – they analyse what happens when dramatic texts are staged on the video sharing platform YouTube. Apart from reconsidering the applicability of the general tenets of adaptation theory to this special case of adaptation, the authors attempt to delimit the degree of generic change that such appropriation requires. By using as the example Samuel Beckett’s oeuvre and its creative, often unauthorized, re-positioning via the user-friendly YouTube interface, they argue that this new media form can help to rethink the issues of authorship, reception and authority.

The following section, “Adapting History,” examines the ways in which historical events, personae or sources are appropriated by the theatre. Kara McKechnie’s “Gloriana – The Queen’s Two Selves” offers a glimpse at complex multimedia transfer of historical material. First, it inspects the appropriation of historical and literary texts in the creation of the opera Gloriana in 1953; secondly, it unearths formal modifications and changes in the subject matter which were later implemented in the process of stage-to-screen adaptation. In view of this ongoing intertextual and intermedial exchange, McKechnie argues for a novel take at the analysis of opera as an innate adaptation genre. Sarah Giese’s inspection of two recent realizations of the Nuremberg Trials raises fundamental questions relating to the staging of history. These refer to the adaptability of historical events, to the methodological framework that such adaptation requires as well as to the issues that are being raised in adaptations of history. Finally, the recontextualisation of more distant history is at stake in Julia Boll’s “The Spoils of War,” devoted to
two modern adaptations of Euripides’ *Women of Troy, Women of War*. Boll inspects the changes made to update the play to fit into contemporary context. She also attempts to define factors behind the revival of the play, its applicability and popularity as a vehicle for the staging of contemporary wars.

The next chapter of this collection brings together papers which are focused on the problems of intercultural adaptation. On the basis of stage translations of Rona Munro’s *Iron* (Edinburgh 2002, Athens 2003 and Itami, Osaka, 2006), Kathy Smith attempts to find reasons for the cultural mobility and transferability of the play into various cultural contexts. In view of audiences’ responses to the theme of mother/daughter relationship, which is central to the play, she argues for a possible correlation between a Freudian reading of the play and spectatorial engagement across cultural borders. Smith’s preoccupation with the universality of adapted works is contrasted with the issues of transculturation and indigenization that are explored by the remaining two papers. Ewald Mengel and Margarete Rubik’s report on the “Cultural Transfer, Translation and Reception of Anglophone Drama on Viennese Stages in the 20th Century” offers some reflections on the methodological possibilities in the analysis of adaptation understood as transculturation. The authors offer a pluralist framework, informed by the theory of cultural transfer, drama translation and reception theory, as a way of accounting for the transcultural character of adaptations. They review several productions of Edward Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* to argue that this play’s decontextualization and domestication are exemplary of a wider trend towards the assimilation of significantly culture-specific dramatic texts in Vienna. Like Mengel and Rubik, Albert-Reiner Glaap is interested in a comparison of adaptations embedded in distinct cultural contexts. His discussion of two versions of Shakespeare’s *King Lear* – Richard Rose’s Canadian project *Hysterica, Or To Have To Hold* (1990) and *Leah*, commissioned by the New Zealand Festival of the Arts in 2000 – encompasses the play’s indigenization and concentrates on the issues of gender-bending and their significance in the contemporary revisions of the play.

Appropriately, the final word in this collection is left to the playwrights, adaptors and directors themselves. David Eldridge provides a
fascinating account of the perils and tribulations of adapting the Dogme movie *Festen* for the stage – and the ultimate collaborative triumph that came out of heated arguments. Polly Teale explains how the work of Shared Experience has relied on established classics, but at the same time attempts to transcend the limitations of ‘heritage’ adaptations.

It is high time that adaptation studies followed Thomas Leitch’s advice and left the backwaters of academia – it is equally high time that theatre and performance studies realized the full significance of adaptation studies to their concerns. A stage adaptation merely lays bare and brings to the forefront intertextual processes and the inevitable hybridity that inform all kinds of theatre performance. It is our conviction that research into stage palimpsests reflects the translational, intertextual, and intermedial turn in a variety of academic disciplines and we hope that this volume will provoke further work in this under-researched intersection of theatre studies and adaptation studies.

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I. Adapting Theatre History: Intratextuality
‘Under Redevelopment:’ The Tradition of City Comedy in Contemporary British Drama

In 1999, prior to the Broadway opening of Closer, Patrick Marber was asked about plans for his next play. Whereas most writers become taciturn on this subject, Marber was unusually forthcoming: “What I want to write is a great big funny play, a huge bitter vicious laughter machine, a big Jonsonian public play” (Macaulay). In other words, Patrick Marber made it be known that he wanted to write a modern Jacobean City Comedy.

While to date Marber’s project has failed to materialize, previous work (with the notable exception of After Miss Julie), including Dealer’s Choice, Closer and Howard Katz have all formed part of a “loose trilogy of plays in and about contemporary London” (Buse). The 2007 production of Don Juan in Soho could justifiably claim to make this a quartet.

Indeed, the dramatization of London has been an ongoing concern of British dramatists since the mid 1990s, and can be traced from Simon Bent’s Goldhawk Road in 1996 to Samuel Adamson’s Southwark Fair in 2006. David Eldridge’s Market Boy was also on at the Royal National Theatre in the same year as Adamson’s play and its performance in the Olivier – the largest of the RNT’s stages – was reminiscent of the “big Jonsonian public play” that Marber spoke about.

It has been noted, “the first decade of the Jacobean age witnessed a sudden profusion of comedies satirizing city life” (Gibbons 3). At its
height, City, or Citizen Comedy attracted dramatists including Ben Jonson (often cited as the originator of the genre), Thomas Middleton and John Marston.

London in the early 1600s dominated not only the financial and commercial sectors of the economy but was also the centre of royal patronage and government as well as fashion and entertainment. It was also seen as the bait that attracted every form of human wickedness and depravity, and a source of the acquisitiveness that was believed to define the age.

As the vogue for Revenge Tragedy towards the 1590s waned, so too did the number of plays focusing on the city. Jonson’s *The Devil is an Ass* (1616) has been described as “the terminal point in Jacobean City Comedy” (Gibbons 152), so ending a dramatic convention many thought Jonson himself had inaugurated.

Yet there has always been an element of unfinished business about the genre. City Comedy has been said to be far ahead of the social and economic ideas of its own period (Haynes 11); an opportunity only ever partly met by its dramatists, who increasingly wrote in a formulaic way. As such, City Comedy required dramatists from a later period to more fully understand the possibilities it offered. However, it was not until the end of the 1960s when renewed interest came from a generation of dramatists via a series of adaptations. These included Edward Bond’s version of Thomas Middleton’s *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (1966) and Peter Barnes’s version of Ben Jonson’s *The Devil is an Ass* (1972).

However, it was Howard Brenton’s and David Hare’s collaborative play *Brassneck* (1974) that saw the first attempt at reappropriating City Comedy for a new age. Here, Brenton and Hare took themes and conventions from the genre and incorporated them into their own work by drawing attention to the “underlying grotesqueness, the monopathic characterisation and the evident indignation amounting often to sheer disgust” that could be found in Ben Jonson’s city comedies (Peacock 1).

While *Brassneck* exhibited facets of the City Comedy tradition, it did not constitute a complete rewriting. In contrast, the plays under discussion in this article, namely Barrie Keeffe’s *A Mad World My Masters* (1977), Caryl Churchill’s *Serious Money* (1987), and David Eldridge’s
Market Boy, all engage more closely with the original elements of City Comedy and continue an ongoing exploitation of the genre.

While a re-emergence of City Comedy began in the late 1960s, it was not until the advent of Thatcherism in the 1980s that it truly became viable again when Thatcherite and Reaganite economics drew explicit attention to the power of money in shaping both the individual and society.

City Comedy satirized the world of 1980s finance and its associated social groupings – the most conspicuous being the transatlantic phenomenon of “the yuppie.” City Comedy, where Jacobean London’s quixotic fashions and social customs were recorded and put directly onto the stage, suddenly found itself ideally placed to comment on the dazzling pace of change taking place in the modern city.

Using its “landscape of persons” (Haynes 10), City Comedy eschewed modern traditions of psychological verisimilitude and provided a form of drama that could react quickly and wittily to contemporary events, much as agit-prop theatre had done in the 1970s. Serious Money exemplified this. By abandoning naturalistic characterization, Churchill was able to produce a satire that not only lambasted the city’s greed, but presented social observation and argument in a complex and rapid manner without the need for plot and character motivation to dominate. Despite some not seeing the play as a “lasting work” by Churchill (Fitzsimmons 80), the arguments presented in Serious Money about the mercantilism of the 1980s are just as wide ranging as more well known earlier plays such as Cloud Nine (1979) and Top Girls (1980).

This same energy is also apparent in David Eldridge’s Market Boy. Despite being written nearly twenty years after Serious Money, similar reappropriations from City Comedy are incorporated in its re-evaluation of Thatcherism on the town of Romford during the 1980s. What is interesting is that Eldridge had revisited the 1980s before in M.A.D. (2004), but here he uses a very different dramatic form. In this more ‘private’ drama Eldridge draws parallels between family life and the Cold War, with its title referring to the omnipresent threat of both nuclear and family Armageddon.

However, the self-consciously “public” nature of Jacobean City Comedy, with its large casts and numerous fast moving scenes, is more
suited to the alternative account of the 1980s that we find in Market Boy. Here, everyone’s personal history is claimed by the market community along with the town of Romford itself. The public space and spectacle of the market also show the rapid social change that marked the 1980s as we trace the changing social mores created through Thatcherism.

Yet, it is important to note that Market Boy’s borrowings from City Comedy are not self-conscious comparisons of the past with the present in the same way as Keeffe’s A Mad World my Masters or Churchill’s Serious Money. While Market Boy evokes the past – namely Romford’s past – through briefly resurrecting historical figures associated with the town, these cameo appearances are there to give a sense of an ongoing continuity to the life of the market.

In contrast, both Serious Money and A Mad World My Masters in their opening scenes deliberately link past and present. In the latter, Keeffe assembles all his principal characters on Hackney Marshes through the event of a cockfight. This not only suggests Elizabethan / Jacobean London but also provides a frame by which to present the Sprightly family whose credo is based around such illicit activities.

Serious Money links the two ages in a piece of meta-theatre, more in keeping with City Comedy’s self-reflexive device of the play within a play. The opening scene incorporates an extract, not from a Jacobean City Comedy but from a play written in 1692 by Thomas Shadwell called The Stockjobbers. However, this introductory scene presents a world based around avaricious trickery familiar to Jacobean City Comedy, where worthless patents are sold, such as “a Mouse-Trap, that will invite all mice in, nay rats too, whether they will or no” (Churchill 1). This earlier play provides a historical link to the early beginnings of the stock market, which can then be directly contrasted with the sudden coup de théâtre of the stage being transformed into the stock market of 1987.

The action of Shadwell’s play can be read in two ways: as an indication that the spirit of avarice and duplicity are constant in whatever age they are practiced. Alternatively, the Jobbers’ intention to “turn the penny” (Churchill 2) through harebrained schemes involving Chinese Rope-Dancers and contraptions that allow a person to walk under water
are indicators of a more innocent age, where chicanery is carried out by witty gentleman on victims who can afford to be gulled. The sudden switch to the dealing rooms of London in 1987 by contrast reveal a world where greed leads to committing larceny on a global scale, siphoning off money from Third World debt and even murder.

One recurrent feature and problem of City Comedy is the contradiction between “commerce and celebration” (Wells 37). Whereas Jacobean dramatists evaded the contradiction between avarice and festivity by theatrical means such as “dramatic framings, doublings and disguises” (Wells 37), in Serious Money this sense of festivity is lost through the all-encompassing desire to make money. While there are moments of exuberance, these involve gratuitous consumption and vulgar displays of wealth.

While the air of celebration in City Comedy manifests itself through the wit of gentlemen rogues such as Middleton’s Follywit, and Eldridge’s Essex market traders, Churchill’s characters on the London stock exchange conspicuously lack this quality. Here, insults and profanity substitute for wit; they also lack the imagination of their Jacobean ancestors in the methods they employ to gull their victims. The traders at Klein Merrick and LIFFE rely on low cunning and bravado, while their schemes lack the panache afforded through disguise or imaginative enterprise. Their tools for modern coney catching are the telephone, computer and fax machine, while their methodology involves a prescribed system of chasing money through a complicated set of bargaining procedures involving the buying and selling of shares on the world stock market.

However, the combination of avarice and innocence, reminiscent of Jacobean City Comedy, can be found in Barrie Keeffe’s A Mad World My Masters, where the Sprightly’s use of disguise sees them revel in the sheer enjoyment of taking part in trickery for financial gain: as such, their actions can be more benevolently judged as acts of cleverness than greed. This important element is missing from Churchill’s Serious Money and the tone of hollow bacchanal is exemplified by the song “Five More Glorious Years” that closes the play:

These are the best years of our lives, let wealth and favour be our guide
We can expect another five, join hands across the great divide [...]

23
Graham Saunders

So raise your oysters and champagne, and as we toast the blushing bride
Pon crystal mountains of cocaine, our nostrils flare and open wide. (Churchill 113)

“Five More Glorious Years” also refers to the re-election of the Thatcher government and a continuing celebration of the city, yet Eldridge’s Market Boy is far more explicit than Churchill in making connections to the frenetic energy of the market being shaped through Thatcherite economics. This even includes placing the figure of Mrs Thatcher on stage. Here, Romford Market becomes a set piece in miniature for her experiment with ‘popular capitalism.’ In a scene where a prospective Labour candidate has been jeered and pelted by the market traders who announce, “We’re with Maggie,” Mrs Thatcher asserts, “This is my market, do you understand me? Mine! No one preaches in this free market except me!”(Eldridge 53).

Yet much of the appeal of Serious Money in 1987 came from its spontaneous response to events as they happened. While the song Five More Glorious Years implies that the greed and hedonism of the city cannot last, Eldridge with the benefit of hindsight can show the aftermath of Thatcherism, when the economic recession of the early 1990s set in. This affects the characters from Romford market such as the Meat Man’s bankruptcy and eventual suicide, to Snooks, the former London bond dealer returning to plead for his old job after the stock market collapse.

Vital features of City Comedy arise from its chosen locations. Ben Jonson’s comedies are a case in point. Bartholomew Fair (1614) is set in the Spitalfields area of London, while The Alchemist is set in Blackfriars. Hackney Marshes in Barrie Keeffe’s A Mad World My Masters also functions as a meeting place for illicit activity, as do the trading floors in Serious Money. However, in Churchill’s play location becomes arbitrary, whereby financial acquisitions are made by telephone via trading markets around the world. London as a city with a distinct identity is made nebulous, whereby location becomes defined via two ends of a telephone, computer or a fax machine. This uncertainty as to where financial transactions take place accounts for the traders believing that they are above the law. Stockbroker Greville Todd explains that financial malpractice is looked at differently elsewhere:
Dammit, why should he die for something that’s not a crime? (It’s not illegal in America, Switzerland, Japan, it’s only been illegal here the last few years.).

(Churchill 27)

The blurring of location in *Serious Money* is based on an actual event known as “Big Bang” which took place in the City Of London in 1986, “when the markets were opened to foreign banks and the distinction between jobbers (who had shares available) and brokers (who bought and sold shares on their clients’ behalf ) was abolished” (Churchill, Preface). Although a modern event, there is something Jacobean in the idea of “Big Bang” as it brings to mind the plague that affected London throughout the summer of 1610 when *The Alchemist* was written. It too was unpredictable and its effects were felt both by those who inhabited the city and those well beyond its environs. The plague is used by Jonson as a metaphor for the forces of chaos “reproducing illicit forms, mixtures, boundary violations of all sorts” that are met by order through “regulation, documentation and analysis” (Tennenhouse 164). The chaotic elements in *The Alchemist* are the opportunist criminals Doll, Face and Subtle, who take advantage of the confusion and terror caused by the plague to commandeer Lovewit’s house. Order is finally restored by Lovewit himself, who not only regains possession of his house but profits from the criminal activity during his absence. Likewise, the feeling of wholesale spree in *Serious Money* is threatened when the Department of Trade and Industry are called to investigate claims of insider trading. However, unlike *The Alchemist*, where order is readily restored, in *Serious Money* no one is brought to justice for insider trading, or for the murder of Jake Todd. The song “Five More Glorious Years” that closes the play seems to confirm that the riotous excesses, “crossing forbidden frontiers,” (Churchill 113) will continue unabated.

Big Bang also reappropriates the traditional City Comedy motif of conflict between young and old marrying for love over dynastic advantage. Instead, the inter-generational conflict in *Serious Money* comes from ambitious Traders such as Durkfield and the older established Bankers who still maintain that they run the City. Durkfield is a creature forged out of Big Bang and shows marked similarities with his Jacobean counterpart, who “owed their power not to the possession of land, like old feudal nobility […] but solely to their business ability”
In Jacobean City Comedy, this antagonism dramatized an underlying anxiety that older, feudal forms of class structure were being challenged in a political climate that actively endorsed the promotion of aggressive free enterprise, which quickly bred and promoted “new men” like Dorkfield and Grimes. It is also not difficult to see that with sudden access to wealth and power these men suddenly represented a threat to the older generation. Zackerman, one of the bankers in Serious Money, believes that following Big Bang a new order will emerge that will ruthlessly crush all in its way:

The financial world won’t be the same again
Because the traders are coming down the fast lane [...] 
If you’re making the firm ten million you want a piece of the action. (Churchill 15)

Here, the fight to obtain wealth is motivated by class just as much as greed. Men like Grimes represent a threat to the old elitist order. In remembering his schooldays, Grimes recalls that he had already been consigned to mediocrity:

My school reports used to say I was too aggressive 
(but it’s come in quite useful) 
My old headmaster wouldn’t call me a fool again [...] 
I could kiss his boots the day he kicked me out of school. (Churchill 12)

Churchill represents the established gentry, (who we encounter together with the new breed of trader at a hunt meeting), as essentially moribund. She achieves this purely through the repetitious and trivial content of their language:

MRS CARRUTHERS. The hound that I walked goes up front with the best. 
FARMER. The best of the pack is that cunning old bitch. 
LADY VERE. His fetlocks swell up so I’ll give him a rest. (Churchill 16)

However, Churchill does not simply pit the old aristocratic order against the new. Just as it should not be taken as fact that natural antagonism existed between established gentlemen and the new merchant class in Elizabethan and Jacobean London (Gibbons 33) – so we see representatives of the old order in Serious Money such as Jake and Scilla Todd slipping easily between the worlds of old and new money.
While class antagonism exists in *Serious Money* between the aristocratic bankers and the ‘oiks’ who run the trading floors, the inter-generational struggle of Jacobean City Comedy is instead transformed into a war involving the forces of old money generated by the banks against the brash new money coming from the world stock-markets. Class subsequently becomes irrelevant in terms of being able to hold one’s own on the trading floor. When money is the all-important commodity, accidents of birth are seen as irrelevant. Scilla Todd, a LIFFE dealer, is the aristocratic daughter of a wealthy stockbroker but has defected from her class to work “down with the oiks, it’s more exciting” (Churchill 11). Here, class becomes a commodity indistinguishable from the pork bellies or coffee sold on the exchanges. Class is something to be bought as a life-style accoutrement rather than for any intrinsic worth it may hold. In *Serious Money*, the only necessity for class is as a means to be “classy”, as when Grimes speaks of a company “recruiting a whole lot of Sloanes / Customers like to hear them on the ‘phones / Because it don’t sound Japanese” (Churchill 11). It is the outward veneer of respectability that class gives that is prized - nothing else matters because the traders are certain that the future belongs to them rather than the older ruling classes. By the end of the play Churchill seems to envisage a new hybridity of class holding sway, bred from the chaos of the trading floor represented by Scilla: “I’ve the cunning and connections of the middle class. And I’m tough as a yob” (Churchill 110).

By contrast, the Sprightly family in Keeffe’s *A Mad World My Masters* and Eldridge’s *Market Boy* represent those lower down the social order, and while they display ample guile and cunning are never destined to escape from the confines prescribed by their class. Fate, and eventually the class system itself, conspire to keep them in exactly the same position that they started. For the Sprightlys, part of the problem lies in their lack of naked ambition – even their scheme to collect the life insurance policy of twenty thousand pounds is modest. Gran wants the money so she can “soak [her] varicose veins under the Niagara Falls and get f**ked by a couple of young lithe Greek studs,” while Vi simply wants the money “for a deposit, on a three-bedroom, end-of-terrace house in Harlow, with an integral garage” (Keeffe 16). Horace Claugh-
ton, the man who stands between their obtaining the payout is finally amazed that, “They went to all this trouble ... two deaths ... for a mere twenty thousand pounds?” (Keeffe 53).

Similarly, in Market Boy, the last scene offers a quick resume of what befell its principal characters. Apart from Jason and Nut-Nut, people’s vistas are still confined to Essex with the majority never moving far beyond the market. This attitude is articulated best by the “Girl” who’s “got a café on South Street” but has “Never met the right one – I should move out of Essex, really, and give myself half a chance” (Eldridge 126). The only other person who has moved on from Romford Market is the eponymous “Boy” of the play’s title. Like Snooks, at first he works in the City, but unlike the Essex traders in Serious Money – and again with the hindsight of being written in 2006 – the Boy “retrained – joined an ad agency IT department. Second guessed the dotcom boom [...] and funded my own digital agency” (Eldridge 126).

Unlike the pessimism that ends Serious Money, where men like Grimes seemed to be in the ascendancy and the stock market unassailable, Market Boy ends on a note of optimism and self-recognition. The Boy, unlike Churchill’s Yuppies or the Jacobean coney-catchers, whilst inculcated from a young age with the instinct to sell, recognizes his good fortune and knows “better than anyone there are limits to what the free market can achieve” (Eldridge 126).

Whereas in Jacobean City Comedy “everyone is driven by sheer (sexual) desires” (Müller 352), in Serious Money the obsession to make money have become petrified into a mood of sterility. This is illustrated in the wooing scene between Zackerman and Jacinta Condor who are kept apart by busy schedules and the restless desire to make money rather than love.

JACINTA. Maybe we could drink some English beer
I have a meeting at eight,
It won’t go on late.
Maybe at half-past nine?
ZAC. No, I don’t think... (Churchill 67-8)

The feeling of wariness about sex can be explained in part by the threat of AIDS. By 1987, the full implications of what many saw as a contemporary plague had only just begun to be assimilated. Although one could
argue that nervous jokes about “the pox” abounded in Jacobean City Comedy, the mood of fear was far less extreme. Dramatists and adulterers alike were more than aware that long before syphilis could claim its victims other mortal scourges would have struck first. This atmosphere of sexual caution against the pursuit of money binds, albeit in a negative manner, the themes of sex and money which so dominate traditional Jacobean City Comedy. Jacinta Condor sums up this new relationship:

AIDS is making the advertisers perplexed. Because it’s no longer too good to have your product associated with. But it’s a great marketing opportunity. Like the guys opening up blood banks where you pay to store your own blood in case of an accident and so be guaranteed immunity. (It’s also a great time to buy into rubber). (Churchill 62)

Barrie Keeffe’s A Mad World My Masters comes closest to the frank sexuality we are familiar with in Jacobean City Comedy. AIDS had yet to appear in 1977, and so we find Horace Claughton’s behaviour ruled by the whims of priapism. It is through this weakness that the Sprightly’s plan to compromise Claughton in a scheme involving Vi disguising herself as an Angela Rippon look-alike striptease artist.

It is also interesting that both Keeffe and Churchill dispense with the figure of the Courtesan in their city comedies, although in Serious Money one can still detect elements in Jacinta Condor, whose characteristics of ruthless cunning and avidity place her somewhere between the courtesan and adroit witty female of Jacobean comedy. Jacinta uses her guile to escape unpunished for the act of embezzling aid money, and in an ironic twist to the harmonious endings of Jacobean City Comedy announces a forthcoming marriage: “Jacinta marries Zac next week and they honeymoon in Shanghai. (Good business to be done in China now. )” (Churchill 111).

However, the ending of Churchill’s City Comedy mimics and satirizes the final scenes of Middleton’s A Mad World My Masters and Marston’s The Dutch Courtezan (1605), where “under the surface of a light, though aggressive City Comedy there is the threat of death and complete extinction” (Müller 359). These darker concerns also occupy Brenton and Hare’s quasi-City Comedy Brassneck, which draws together these motifs of sex, death and money even more forcefully in the play’s final scene, set in a strip joint aptly named “The Lower Depths
Club.” Here, the entrepreneurial Bagley family have decided to look for a new market in the trafficking of Chinese heroin:

VANESSA. Poppies. It comes from poppies. A bleeding tender flower.
CLIVE. Customers?
ROCHESTER. School kids. (Brenton and Hare 102)

Brassneck ends with a toast to “The last days of capitalism,” and arguably this is the chief concern of the contemporary reappropriations of City Comedy, where the innocent confidence tricksters and mountebanks of the Jacobean stage have been superseded by a corporate business ethic that can deal without pangs of conscience in commodities like heroin and the nuclear arms trade in order to “turn the penny.”

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The Tradition of City Comedy in Contemporary British Drama


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Theatre History as Adaptation: Nicholas Wright’s *Cressida* (2000)

I. Contextualising Cressida

While representations of theatre history on the stage may not necessarily be the first type of text to come to mind when adaptations are evoked, plays about the theatrical past, which re-make and transpose documentary and literary (dramatic) texts into another time and/or medium, constitute a non-negligible subgroup of contemporary English drama. Probably the most conspicuous cluster of recent plays about theatre history is set in Renaissance or Neo-classical times. It includes works such as *Compleat Female Stage Beauty* by Jeffrey Hatcher (first perf. 1999), *Playhouse Creatures* (1993) and *A Laughing Matter* (2002) by April de Angelis, *The Libertine* by Stephen Jeffreys (1994) and *Cressida* by Nicholas Wright (2000).

These plays share several family resemblances. They are all set in the world of London theatre and thus provide an opportunity for anachronistic references to contemporary (theatre) life and playwriting. More specifically, they also reflect meta-theatrically on styles of acting and the relativity and transitoriness of theatrical conventions of representing

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1 For the classification of historical fictions as adaptations cf. e.g. Hutcheon 8-9; Leitch 280, 285 and Andrew 190-192.
2 The immense success of the film *Shakespeare in Love* (1998), the most popular work of this kind, which has since constituted an important reference point in the minds of critics and audiences for fictional representations of theatre history in drama and film, may have contributed to the fact that *The Libertine* and *Compleat Female Stage Beauty* could be adapted into films.
‘real’ life. These themes are most obvious in those works that are centrally concerned with the convention of boy acting, which can appear alien or contrived from a present-day perspective, where all-male productions of plays containing female roles are usually perceived as either experimental, non-realistic or parodistic. Intertextual and often playful references to canonical plays from the Renaissance or Neo-classical periods locate the plays in a web of texts that evokes post-structuralist conceptions of a general text or a chamber of echoes and establishes a trans- or ahistorical arc between the past and present which, at the same time, it collapses and deconstructs.

This essay concentrates on the analysis of Nicholas Wright’s play *Cressida*, because, apart from being a meta-theatrical adaptation of theatre history for the stage, the play goes beyond the other works mentioned so far by also reflecting on central theoretical aspects concerning the practice of adaptation. In *Cressida* the history of English theatre is implicitly presented as a process of adaptation in a biological sense, in which only the fittest texts survive the historical selection process. Moreover, the play constantly raises questions about originality, authority and the ethics of adapting texts – a thematic emphasis little surprising in the work of an author whose *oeuvre* as a playwright includes a multitude of different kinds of adaptations. Not only has Wright adapted novels by Zola (*Therese Raquin*, 1990), Balzac (*The Crimes of Vautrin*, 1983) and, most famously Philip Pullman (*His Dark Materials*, 2003) for the stage; he has also created English versions of plays by Chekov (*Three Sisters*, 2003), Pirandello (*Six Characters in Search of an Author*, 1987; *Naked*, 1998), Ibsen (*John Gabriel Borkman*, 1996) and Wedekind (*Lulu*, 2001), and has transposed a Jacobean drama into a South-African Johannesburg setting (*The Custom of the Country*, 1983). Moreover, Wright’s most recent original plays *Cressida* (2000), *Vincent in Brixton* (2002), *The Reporter* (2007) and *He’s Talking* (2008) have all been based directly on factual material.

II. Past and Present in *Cressida*

*Cressida* is a two-act play set in the 1630s in London. The piece was first produced under the direction of Nicholas Hytner in spring and summer 2000 by the Almeida Theatre at the Albery in London. The star and
main attraction of the production was Michael Gambon, who played the protagonist John Shank, an actor of the King’s Men and trainer of boy players in the Caroline Age. The play is conceived as a memory play, in which the dying Shank looks back at and re-lives events from the last weeks of his life. Yet, this framework does not govern the entire text, since Cressida also contains scenes in which Shank is not present and which therefore cannot originate in his consciousness. They take place between the second major character in the play, boy actor Stephen Hammerton, and another of Shank’s protégés, John Honyman, who is rapidly growing out of female roles. Since these scenes go beyond Shank’s memory, the spectators can partly discover these two characters and their lives for themselves, without mediation by another member of the fictional world. Not only does this strengthen the guidance of sympathy towards Stephen and Honyman, it also enhances the emotional involvement with these key representatives of the boy actors’ world in Cressida. Amid all other forms of male bonding in the play, their relationship best exemplifies the precarious balance, which also governs Shank’s actions, between a desire for love or at least companionship on the one hand and the pressure of rivalry inherent in a profession where one has to please in order to survive on the other.

The plot is set in motion by the arrival of Stephen at the Globe, where he is to play the part of First Fairy in a performance of A Midsummer Night’s Dream. At this interview, Shank learns that he has been ruined because a theatre in which he had invested has gone bankrupt. Since Shank had borrowed the money from the board of the King’s Men, he faces destitution, which he tries to avoid by digging up his savings and selling off his assets and Stephen. The boy, however, proves to be unsellable because of his “excessively fey” (17) acting style. Together with Richard Robinson, the star actor of the King’s Men, and a former boy actor himself, Shank therefore hits on the idea of presenting Stephen in a showy title role, though not one in which the boy will have to speak too many lines (56-57), in order to give people the impression that Stephen can act. Shank hopes to sell Stephen afterwards to another company who will then have to put up with the allegedly talentless boy. In the key scene of the play, Shank therefore trains Stephen to perform the female title part from Shakespeare’s Troilus and Cressida. As in-
tended, Stephen is a huge success, even prompting Robinson to offer Shank to erase his debt if he does not sell the boy to another company. Yet, Stephen does not play the part of Cressida as Shank has taught him. He delivers a naturalistic performance which would appear realistically feminine from a present-day perspective, but which Shank regards as “a total and utter betrayal of all I stand for” and as a degradation of “proper acting” (86). Shank therefore insists on selling Stephen to William Blagrave, the deputy of the Master of the Revels, who, in a clever combination of offices, is also about to take over the bankrupt theatre in which Shank had invested. Yet, just when Shank is about to sign the contract, he has an apoplexy, which eventually leads to his death. The play ends on Stephen, who becomes a star of the King’s Men, and Honey, who has by now outgrown female parts, waiting for stage calls behind the scenes of the Blackfriars Theatre.

The relative simplicity of the plot indicates that the main focus of Wright’s play lies somewhere else than on events. The dramatist is more interested in evoking and re-working theatre life, and in particular actors’ lives in the Caroline age, and presents them as decidedly unglamorous and gritty. The play never actually shows the characters in a public performance, and thus at their moment of splendour; when characters in Cressida appear on the Globe stage, they rehearse or discuss business affairs. Wright, moreover, literally and metaphorically strips the characters down in a scene set after a performance in the Globe dressing room or in another, set in a sauna, where the characters are only covered by towels while they discuss matters as diverse as the history of the Globe, acting, censorship and sexual preferences. Even in apparently jollier parts of the play that evoke the communal aspects of company life, such as the scene in which the King’s Men celebrate a performance over a meal at an inn, the dark spots of theatre life in the Caroline Age are clearly visible. This life is presented as a continuous struggle for survival and putting-up with hardships. The boys are treated as mere commodities to be sold and bought by acting companies or to be solicited for sexual favours by interested members of the public. They can have only little hopes for the future, since only the odd boy actor is able to pull off an acting career as an adult. Most of them, the play implies, will end up with minor roles, work in small backstage jobs, or will have to prostitute
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themselves in order to survive (25). Mistreatment and abuse, even though not shown on stage, are repeatedly hinted at, just like the menace of diseases such as the plague. Moreover, rival groups, censorship, abuse of power and mismanagement are eternal sources of worry. In this climate, betrayal and distrust flourish.

The unsentimental language of Shank, the most desperate and disillusioned character in the play, and of his entourage also helps to erase nostalgia from Wright's depiction of Caroline theatre life. The speeches are full of insults, swearwords and scatological references. Apart from the sexing-up of the play through continuous allusions to male prostitution and references to “Buggers and sods” (39) and “bumboys” (27, 40), the repeated use of words such as “fuck” (7, 28), “arse” (27) or “tart” (21) renders any sentimentalisation of the actors’ lives improbable.

This approach might imply that Wright’s presentation of theatre history is more realistic than some more nostalgic celebrations of the theatrical heritage. Yet, the play does not try to evoke the impression of a factual account or of historical accuracy, even though its characters and several details concerning the plot are based on historical sources (Wright 93-96) – a fact that was also emphasized in the programme for the first production of the play. It contained quotations relating to the phenomenon of boy acting from various Renaissance texts, both literary and non-literary, such as the Henslowe Papers, Sir Henry Herbert’s Daybook and Ben Jonson’s “Epitaph on Salomon Pavy: A Boy Actor.” Since these texts provide individual hints at the topic rather than a comprehensive picture, they indirectly characterise Wright as a creator of history, and his activity as an emplotment fleshing out historical sources.

The result is a text that evokes a feeling of timelessness, which for example de Jongh remarked upon in a review of Cressida for the London Evening Standard: “There is […] no real sense of period, of the worrying midst of Charles I’s personal rule. You might as well be in 1612. People talk with plenty of period touches, but they still speak with the voices of today.” This effect is due to the many anachronisms in Cressida, which are particularly obvious in Wright’s treatment of the themes of masculinity and (homo-)sexuality. The nomenclature employed by Shank and the company dresser Jhon in their down-to-earth discussion
of same-sex encounters, for example, culminates in Jhon calling himself “an old queen” (44), although the Oxford English Dictionary records the first unambiguous use of the word in the meaning of ‘male homosexual’ for the year 1919. While this might appear like a harmless game with language history, it also illuminates the inexorable link between language and perception: by calling himself “an old queen,” the character of Jhon is anachronistically turned into a modern-day homosexual in the spectator’s mind. The same applies to Stephen, who fulfills all the modern clichés of male queerness with his “unconsciously girlish” (14) behaviour and body language and his interest in clothes, hair and make-up.

Moreover, many references in Cressida clearly relate to contemporary theatre life. Most obviously, the pressure from rival theatres and the paramount role of money for any decision-making process in a non-subsidized theatrical system parallel contemporary issues. The hierarchical organisation within theatres is still dominant, and even if state censorship has officially been abolished, the dependence on subsidies of a considerable number of theatres inevitably exposes them to the influence of the political powers that be. More obviously, star actors still excite audiences, celebrity is still transient and the artists still struggle for a good performance.

The impression of transhistorical continuity in Cressida is also supported by repeated references to the topos of theatrum mundi. Shank frequently recurs to this image, for example by comparing dying to a “hideous long soliloquy” (7) or by referring to the best way out of an unpleasant conversation with Richard Robinson as a “[t]icky exit” (28). A similar conflation of life and theatre occurs when Honey claims that he felt like Shylock during a fraudulent business transaction (31). Life is not only likened to drama, however, it is also repeatedly, and more generally, referred to as a story (19) or text, for example when Blagrave calls Shank’s will “an illuminating footnote to an unusual life” (8). In view of the fact that many of the documents which the characters in Cressida handle are faked, however, the authenticity of both text and life are drawn into question. Like many authors of ‘reflexive history plays’ since the 1970s (cf. Berninger 96-105), Wright thus implicitly comments on the nature of his own text as historiography and hints at the prob-
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...lems of writing and re-constructing history. The result is a conflation of life and text, reality and fiction and past and present.

III. Cressida and Key Issues of Adaptation Studies

While these devices support Wright’s meta-historiographical reflections, they also serve as indirect comments on the complex relationship of the past and present in general and thus relate to the more specific notion of theatre history as a gradual process of adaptation in the biological sense. The transposition of the notion of genetic adaptation onto the cultural sphere has its most famous forerunner in Richard Dawkins’s concept of ‘memes’ as basic units of cultural symbolism that function and replicate like genes (cf. Carroll xiv). As Carroll has pointed out, this notion is fundamentally flawed, because, in contrast to genes, units of cultural symbolism are not self-replicating but are only repeated “if they activate responses in a human mind [...]. The causal mechanisms involved in transmitting cultural patterns involve complex interactions of psychological dispositions and environmental circumstances” (ibid). Despite this flaw, Dawkins’s concept has repeatedly been taken up in order to sketch cultural history in Darwinian terms. Hutcheon, who instinctively addresses Carroll’s point of criticism, has for example applied it to stories, rather than ideas, and claims that:

Stories do get retold in different ways in new material and cultural environments; like genes, they adapt to those new environments by virtue of mutation – in their ‘offspring’ or their adaptations. And the fittest do more than survive; they flourish. (32)

Wright’s engagement with the idea runs on similar lines and comes across as a selective engagement with the Darwinian theory of natural selection. Of the three tenets of this theory – superfecundity, variation and heritability (Gould 13) – Wright has clearly taken up the first two as well as the syllogistic inference [...] that organisms enjoying differential reproductive success will, on average, be those variants that are fortuitously better adapted to changing local environments, and that these variants will then pass their favored traits to offspring by inheritance [...]. (Gould 13)
The result in *Cressida* is a depiction of theatrical history in which more plays are produced than can possibly survive (the principle of superfecundity), and where innovation and originality are presented as the basic principles that enable the adaptation to new environments, such as changing audience tastes. Since *Cressida* deals with theatre history, the process of adaptation moreover does not only refer to the storylines of plays but also to the ways in which they are realised on stage. It can be argued that, through its treatment of universal themes such as love and betrayal, *Cressida* itself appears as an offspring that has inherited the favoured traits of the fittest plays, the classics.

Wright’s reflections on the topic of theatre history as adaptation are most obviously showcased by textual references to Renaissance plays by canonical writers like Shakespeare, Marlowe, Jonson, Webster and Fletcher, which occur throughout the play. Wright incorporates these writers and their texts into *Cressida* by mentioning character names and play titles, by alluding to plot lines, and by marked and unmarked quotations that appear like a playful game of reference-spotting with the spectator or reader. Many of these references are ultimately identified in the characters’ dialogues, yet there are also some which remain unexplained: Shank’s opening soliloquy, for example, contains quotations from several Shakespeare plays which are not identified in the play text itself.

While only few audience members will be able to recognise these quotations and their sources during a performance of *Cressida*, they nonetheless create a kind of textual referentiality that points outside the play text at the historical context in which the play is set as well as at the reception history of the plays alluded to. The prerequisite for their potential recognisability is after all that they are still perceived to constitute a cultural heritage worth being passed on. That the plays have achieved this status at all is in turn due to the fact that they have managed to “evolve and mutate to fit new times and different places” (Hutcheon 176).

The theme that some texts are fitter than others for survival is illustrated in *Cressida* through references to plays such as “The Coursing of a Hare, or The Madcap” (23), which have not come down to us, the play
implies, due to their formulaic nature, which becomes apparent in a discussion between Robinson and the sarcastic Shank:

SHANK. What's it called?
ROBINSON. Some fatuous title.
    He looks back to the top.
     ‘The Coursing of a Hare, or The Madcap’.
SHANK. Oh I don’t know. I can imagine quite a run on that. ‘What shall we do this afternoon?’ ‘I know, let's go and see “The Coursing of a Hare, or The Madcap.”’ What's it about?
ROBINSON. A princess is besieged by suitors, each of whom has to answer three riddles.
SHANK. Oh, original.
ROBINSON. She disguises herself as a shepherdess in order to tell the suitor of her choice the answer. Only to find that he’s her long-lost brother who was stolen in his cradle by a crew of Corsican bandits.
SHANK. And is he?
ROBINSON. Is he what?
SHANK. Her brother.
ROBINSON. I don’t know.
SHANK. My guess is somebody switched the babies. […] (23-24)

It has become something of a topos in adaptation studies to refer to the paradoxical situation that adaptations of canonical literary texts into other media, especially those associated with popular culture, are often maligned for their ‘natural’ inferiority to the original, while Shakespeare is celebrated as an original genius although his plays are famously based on and re-work earlier fictional and historiographical sources (e.g. Hutcheon 2-3; Sanders 46; Cardwell 18). Wright engages with both parts of this argument in Cressida and finally resolves it in favour of a holistic approach to the dramatic/theatrical text and a celebration of innovation. The former is visible in Wright’s references to the debates about how media specificity influences the ‘success’ of particular adaptations and about the alleged superiority of word over image. Many writings on adaptations are marked by a discourse of loss resulting from a hierarchical understanding of art forms based on the prioritising of one sign-system over others (cf. Elliott, esp. 1-28). Especially the conversations between the boy actors Alex and Trigg in Cressida illustrate that, in contrast to the logophilia and iconophobia prevalent in writings on literary adaptations by literary scholars, Wright’s play
negates any superiority of the literary text in the theatrical performance and goes against the prejudice that the iconic nature of visual representations favours a passive attitude on the part of the spectator in contrast to the active role required of a reader:

ALEX. What most inspires the inner eye? Description or depiction?
TRIGG. I'm sweeping.
ALEX. When the eye is feasted, does the imagination starve?
TRIGG. I think I've got it. Ask me one last time.
ALEX. Are paint and canvas enemies to fancy?
TRIGG. Do you mean, have plays got too much scenery?
ALEX. Yes. And does it make the poetry less important?
TRIGG. There's no such thing as too much scenery. In winter, when we play indoors, we'll have whole palaces on stage. And woods and jungles. And stormy seas and clouds coming down with gods and goddesses bestowing bounty. I'd rather see that than any amount of acting. (58)3

Concerning the nature of Shakespeare’s plays as adaptations, Cressida implies that success has been reserved to them because they added something new to the familiar elements of plot and characterisation and thus combined the familiar with innovatory elements (cf. Hutcheon 4). The rehearsal process that Wright depicts in Cressida, with its constant repetition of identical lines of text in different ways by the actors, is precisely such a search for an element of surprise and novelty in order to bring a familiar text alive and give the impression “[a]s though no-one had done it before” (66). Innovation, originality and surprise are thus celebrated as the prerequisites of evolution in Cressida, even though older modes of presentation and traditions remain as the subtext of later performances and are shown to possess enriching potential if they are made to feel fresh and new. This is exemplified by the use of the cata-
logue of gestures from John Bulwer’s *Rules of Rhetoric* in the rehearsal scene (65-67). Although Shank, the seventeenth-century character, claims that “[n]obody’s done that stuff on stage for twenty years” (65), the 21st-century actor’s delivery of Cressida’s lines supported by selected conventionalised gestures from the Renaissance can nonetheless create a fully engrossing stage moment, which, according to the stage direction, should be “beautiful, strange; a bit Kabuki but full of emotion” (66). The individual performance as well as the performance history of a text is thus depicted in *Cressida* as a palimpsestic layering process encompassing the textual and performative web surrounding the individual performance.

Commenting on the nature of canon formation, *Cressida* on the one hand celebrates the universality of those plays that ultimately achieve the status of a ‘classic.’ Yet, this celebration goes hand in hand and basically depends on the repeated insistence that these plays only acquired their outstanding status in the course of time. Thus in *Cressida* Shakespeare is not yet considered to be a classic playwright but rather someone who has written some “good old play[s]” (33), and the play debunks any idea of him as an idealistic artist:

JHON. [...] the original board [of the Globe] had only got actors on it. There was Richard Burbage, Tommy Pope, Augustine Phillips...
SHANK. I was there, remember?
JHON. And the only one of all those bastards I remember with any respect is William Shakespeare.
SHANK. Oh really? What’s his claim to fame?
JHON. He was the only one who didn’t leave his shares to his wife and family.
SHANK. Only because he couldn’t stand them. [...] (41)

Theatre history emerges as a process of adaptation and selection in the face of changed circumstances and as the survival of dramatic texts due to their theatrical materialisations and interpretations. The precarious nature of the dramatic text as one that requires a plurimedial adaptation in order to fulfil its potential, and the ephemeral nature of any theatre performance, which must suffice itself while it is also one stone in the mosaic of a play’s reception history, give significance to each single performance, each ritualistic combination of “repetition with variation” (Hutcheon 4).
To some, the result of these variations may appear grotesque or disgusting, like the “Rabbit Surprize” (77), the specialty at the eating-house the King’s Men in Cressida frequent. In Wright’s play, the dish mirrors the process (and result) of adaptation and consists of:

Rabbit, boiled and the bones removed, stuffed with forcemeat, restored to rabbit shape, browned with a salamander and brought to the table with a bunch of myrtle in its mouth and its jawbones stuck in its eyes. That’s what makes it so surprising. (77)

Despite the changes and variations the rabbit has undergone, it is the best dish on the menu and it is vastly preferred to the regular dishes by the actors. Similarly, Wright implies, although the result of adaptation may to some appear grotesque, it is, firstly, necessary to keep up interest and, secondly, may be highly enjoyable.

In such a context, notions of good taste, which in Cressida are repeatedly thematised in the characters’ discussions about the ‘correct’ way of playing particular scenes (e.g. 11-14, 33, 71), are clearly relative, and the insistence on fidelity to the spirit of the original or discourses of loss in relation to adaptations fight a losing battle. They disregard the fact that in analogy to the notion of adaptation in biology, adaptation in the theatre is

a far from neutral, indeed highly active, mode of being, far removed from the unimaginative act of imitation, copying, or repetition that it is sometimes presented as being by literature and film critics obsessed with claims to ‘originality.’ (Sanders 24)

Leitch, for example, rightly emphasises that fidelity in adaptations is the exception rather than the norm (127). Moreover, especially in the context of the theatre with its collaborative production process, it is unclear who the author is whose intentions might be betrayed. Shank certainly seems to think of the (dead) author of the play text in this way, when he disregards an actor’s note in the promptbook of Troilus and Cressida and keeps the text as it was written by “the poet” Shakespeare (63). He represents a concept of “cultural’ adaptation” where “each subsequent adaptation is understood to hold a direct relationship with the culturally established original; this is why each adaptation appears to sustain the original, and not to develop and improve it” (Cardwell 13, 14). However, this notion is belied by several other
elements within the play, which rather point at a biological or genetic conceptualisation of adaptations, where evolution is considered as a linear development away from an ‘original,’ the trajectory of which is shaped by each new adaptation (cf. Cardwell 14-15). The play emphasises, for example, that lines do not belong to the playwright, nor, as Blagrove points out to one of Shank’s boys, to the actors: “[…] it is not your line uniquely. Many young lads before you have had the privilege of speaking it” (13). Stephen’s disobedient portrayal of Cressida moreover shows that even those who adapt the text for the stage depend on those who actually perform on stage to realise their ideas, and that a discourse of ownership around dramatic texts is futile.

The moralistic discourse surrounding adaptation, which often frames it as an act of violation or betrayal (cf. Hutcheon 85/86), is therefore problematised in *Cressida*. Betrayal is ubiquitous in the characters’ lives: Stephen lies in order to get near Honey, Shank betrays Stephen and wants to sell him despite his success, and as the ending of the play reveals, Shank’s entire career is based on an act of betrayal against his friend Salamon Pavey (the boy actor from Ben Jonson’s poem), from whom Shank stole the breaking role as Cressida by deliberately keeping him from learning his lines (92). Since *Troilus and Cressida* in general, and the speech from the play that Shank and Stephen go through in the rehearsal scene in particular, is centrally concerned with the themes of falsehood and truthfulness, Wright’s choice of intertext appears particularly fitting for the characters’ behaviour. The general air of untrustworthiness is broken, however, by the main characters’ relationship towards their art, in which they strive for integrity.

In *Cressida* the choices of all artists are based on the wish to deliver a truthful performance. Thus for Shank, the decisive criterion of the quality of an actor’s work is whether it is believable. He wants to train Stephen to give a performance that he, Shank, can believe (70). Yet Stephen feels inauthentic when he delivers the verse, gestures and feelings in the way Shank has taught him, and insists on his approach of living his character: “If you’re playing a woman, what’s the point in being like anything else? I think it’s daft” (86). Even the impression of truthfulness, the play implies, depends ultimately on novelty and surprise. This thought is expressed in Blagrove’s assessment of Stephen’s
performance, which one could view as being representative of both the 21st-century audience’s attitude towards *Cressida* as well as of the fictional audience’s reaction to Stephen:

> Truth is always new and always startling. Truth in art is the crystal lens through which we behold the world new-born, as clear and bright as through the eye of a child. Tonight we saw, no squeaking puppet of impersonation, but a maiden.
> 
> [... ] (81)

Wright thus paints the process of adaptation as one of inevitable change in which some individuals (and individual notions of truth) enable the continuity of the life form, while others fall by the road. For Shank, Stephen’s illusionist and realistic performance is unacceptable, because it violates his idea of “proper acting” (86). He is shocked by Stephen’s realism and authenticity of feeling, which are, however, presented as precursors of contemporary theatre conventions. It is logical, therefore, that at the end of *Cressida* Shank dies since he has not adapted to changing tastes. Stephen, in contrast, is here to stay. When Shank wants to sell him to Blagrove, Stephen therefore insists “I won’t go. [...] I’m not going anywhere” (85). Through his acting style, through his difference from the other boy actors in his (girlish) behaviour and through the fact that he can actually write his name, he embodies a new, anachronistically post-Enlightenment emphasis on originality and individuality. It is only logical that the play ends with Stephen, since his performance in *Troilus and Cressida* puts into focus that theatrical practices which some might consider as acts of “pissing on the magical fucking flame” (55) of ‘true art’ are actually necessary for enabling the survival of individual texts as well as of the theatre as an art form.

Works Cited

*Primary Literature*

Theatre History as Adaptation: Nicholas Wright’s Cressida


Secondary Literature

Lucia Krämer


I should explain a number of things at the outset. The first is that this paper is a part of a much larger project. The second is that my fascination with this and Brecht’s other plays is both historical and, given my cultural and political leanings, probably inevitable. I was growing up, with an avid interest in the theatre, at the very time that most of Brecht’s plays were beginning to receive professional productions in London. So that, for instance, as a school-kid I saw both Bill Gaskill’s famous productions of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1962) and *Baal* (1963), with Peter O’Toole. I also saw the first production of both *Galileo* (1960) and *Schweyk in the Second World War* (1963) at the Mermaid Theatre in a version that – to correct subsequent writers on the subject and indeed the title-sheet of the programme – was not by Charles Laughton, but incorporates all of the playwright’s subsequent additions and, to quote from Bernard Miles’ own programme note, “is nearly twice the length of the American version” (13). This imprecision about who did what and to what effect leads me to my third point, the realisation that three of the playwrights whose work I concentrated on in *New British Political Dramatists*¹ – Howard Brenton, David Edgar and David Hare – have all had versions/adaptations of the play staged, and in Hare’s case two rather different versions. All are aware that this produces a certain resonance: in “Adapting Galileo,” Hare is careful to talk

¹ That the fourth of these playwrights, Trevor Griffiths, has not completed the set may have much to do with his overall commitment to theatrical naturalism.
of the previous “inspired choice of Howard Brenton as adapter,” whilst in “Translating’ Galileo,” David Edgar writes of his wariness: “I try to avoid ploughing furrows last visited by Howard Brenton and David Hare.” Edgar’s use of the word ‘translating’ is actually somewhat contentious and, although all these versions proclaim themselves on their respective title-pages as ‘translations’ – a term which is in itself extremely contentious – they are all, even more than would conventionally be the case, adaptations.

At the centre of my argument there is, indeed, a central assumption that in Galileo there is a greater degree of inevitability of adaptation in the loose process of converting a text from one language to another than in all of Brecht’s other mature plays. And this brings me to my final, and directly connected, opening point. I am interested in what it is about Brecht’s play that should have attracted the attentions of three of the most prominent of that generation of post-68 playwrights. For reasons that I hope will become clear, I will be looking mostly at the 2006 version by David Hare but, in order to allow a degree of comparison between the various versions, I will eventually be concentrating on one small aspect of the adaptations.

Galileo holds a unique place amongst Brecht’s mature plays. Although much of his work consists of what can be generically defined as historical drama, not one of his other plays is so directly contextualised within its particular historical period, and so concerned with the implications and repercussions of the events occurring in a small and specifically located moment of time. The play continues to offer a series of demanding questions to succeeding generations of audiences in ways that explicitly relate its thematic concerns with the still contested relationship between theory and practice in the playwright’s work. In view of this, the specificity of its location is clearly one of the factors to take into account when assessing its continuing relevance. However, this specificity of location is actually very paradoxical, and has never meant that the play was only, or even chiefly, accessible within the terms of
that historical context.² Re-readings of the play have sought to find parallels between Galileo’s crisis and that of a succession of new contemporaneous contexts: a process initiated by Brecht himself, working on a revised text with Charles Laughton in America in 1947. He wrote:

“The ‘atomic’ age made its debut at Hiroshima in the middle of our work. Overnight the biography of the founder of the new system of physics read differently. The infernal effect of the Great Bomb placed the conflict between Galileo and the authorities of his day in a new, a sharper light”. (“Unvarnished” 8)

Though he immediately adds, “We had to make only a few alterations – not a single one to the structure of the play” (“Unvarnished” 8) – a statement the significance of which will be particularly relevant. But perhaps the single most remarkable aspect of the play as a site of theory/practice contestation is the figure of the central character. The argument over the political or moral propriety of his actions cannot be resolved, for the play will not allow of any firm resolution. Yet, one thing is certain: far more than any of Brecht’s other theatrical protagonists, Galileo is, in Marxist terms, conceived less as a product of history, and more as a producer of history. Brecht may have his protagonist declare, “there is no scientific work which only one man can write” (Vesey 116), but in the recantation scene the force of Andrea’s “So much is gained when only one man stands up and says ‘No’... Unhappy the land that has no heroes!” is never really squashed by his teacher’s scene-ending, “Unhappy the land that is in need of heroes” (Vesey 107-108).

We might relate this to Meyerhold’s exasperation at Stanislavsky’s direction of Hedda Gabler in 1898:

Are we as actors required merely to act? Surely we should be thinking as well? We need to know why we are acting, what we are acting and whom we are instructing or attacking through our performance. And to do that we need to know the psychological and social significance of the play, to establish whether a given character is positive or negative, to understand which society or section of society the author is for or against. (qtd. in Braun 9)

² Of course this is also true of, for example, Mother Courage, but in a far more generalised way.
This dichotomy is not only central to defining what is conventionally taken to be the key distinction between the two approaches that we label – sometimes more in hope than in judgement – Stanislavskian and Brechtian, but is above all of particular pertinence to this play of Brecht’s. It is not simply that, in the abstract as it were, readers and spectators, are unable to agree on whether Galileo is a psychologically conceived figure or a socially constructed one, or whether he is something of each and, if so, to what extent in each case? It is also true that in practice, and I use the term technically here, interpreters/constructors of the texts, and in particular directors and those responsible for translations/adaptations of the play, either come to the exercise with a decision on the matter already formed or with an awareness of the minefield that they are about to enter.

Let us consider, for example, the production of *Galileo* at the new National Theatre in London in 1980. It was not only the first time this play had been staged there, but the first time any Brecht play had been. It was directed by John Dexter, a man who declared that he “was going to get rid of all the Marxist rubbish in the play” (Callow 114), in which the familiar Galileo=Brecht line would be foregrounded. As Jim Hiley makes clear in *Theatre at Work: The Story of the National Theatre’s Production of Brecht’s Galileo*, Dexter “saw the play as a kind of unconscious autobiography, echoing compromises Brecht himself had made, for example, in order to thrive in post-war East Germany” (53). However, before Dexter had been appointed as director, Howard Brenton had been commissioned and had delivered a ‘translation’ of the play. In his fascinating analysis of ‘the many lives of Galileo,’ Dougal McNeill, argues, perhaps a little over-persuasively, that Brenton was “as part of the project to renew socialist drama and activism in the period of Thatcher’s neo-liberal reforms, trying to re-assess Brecht for political ends” (41). Whether over-persuasively argued or not, there is no doubt that Brenton and Dexter approached the play with very different intentions, and intentions that place them to a considerable extent on opposing sides of the biographical/materialist divide that I described.
above: and, remarkably, both expressed themselves as delighted with the outcome.3

The lack of ideological agreement on the part of director and ‘translator’ in 1980 was nothing less than was to be expected, given the circumstances under which the project had originally been conceived. Peter Hall and John Russell Brown, director and dramaturg of the NT from 1973 (three years before the first auditorium was ready for use), felt strongly that a playwright of Brecht’s international stature should be represented on the South Bank, and from the outset were convinced that it would be by *Galileo*. They attempted what was, for them at least, a non-ideological reading of the play. Brown claimed, “It’s more like other people’s plays than the rest of the canon” (qtd. in Hiley 2). Likewise, on the day of its first performance in the Olivier, Hall talked of its essentially non-subversive nature and predicted that his regime would create productions that would pander to neither political wing, “that will upset *Time Out AND The Daily Telegraph*” (Hiley 3-4).

Brenton had worked from a literal translation of the text (whatever a literal translation might be) and had provided a racier version of the dialogue, perhaps more in line with the vernacular of 1980s London than either early seventeenth century Italy or mid-twentieth century Germany. This only serves to reinforce his intention to find a contemporary resonance of a very particular kind. Although there is much that can be argued in this respect, in many ways it comes down to the dispute that translator and director had about the last scene of the play.

Dexter wanted to cut it completely, planning to end the play with “the visual image of the *Discorsi* crossing the border […] and match it to the end of the previous scene, where the ancient Galileo is seen gobbling his food” (Hiley 52-53) but Brenton argued his corner very strongly:

> How someone lies to the border police, it’s very interesting. You have to see, to experience the book going over the border. Books going over borders are very contemporary. Without the scene, people will think of Galileo at the end, not of his science. (Hiley 54)

3 See Brenton, *Hot Irons* 63; and Dexter, *The Honourable Beast* 239: both quoted in McNeill 87.
Dexter’s response was one of anger, “Well, if you’re going to say that, dear, you might as well not do the play at all” (Hiley 54), but ultimately Brenton prevailed.

In contrast, in 1994, and again in 2006, David Hare cut the final scene almost completely, with Andrea being stopped by a guard who finds the book (in Brenton’s version he had been reading it). There are only two lines of dialogue:

ANDREA: It’s in Latin.
GUARD: Let him through. 4

In other words, the significance of the onward move of the Discorsi towards publication is played down even more than Dexter would have liked (and at least his preferred ending would have been theatrically exciting). And in the haste to end the play, Hare appears to have either forgotten that the Discorsi were not written in Latin (a vital part of the significance of Galileo’s work for Brecht), or to tell us that his guard cannot read. In Edgar’s 2005 ‘translation,’ the final scene is not only played in full, but his version of the final verse is provided by the Singers at the very end (and not at the beginning, as with Brenton) of the scene and, indeed, the play:

And with the book our story’s done –
Blind faith has lost and reason won.
But perhaps we ought to question how
Much faith is placed in reason now.
We must take care of science’s light,
Guard it, keep it, use it right.
In case it proves a flame to fall:
Downwards, to consume us all. 5

Edgar was only too aware of the fact that “the two most recent British translations […] were […] by writers I know, admire, and am some-

4 Translated by David Hare, The Life of Galileo 93. I am extremely grateful to the Brecht estate for provision of the unpublished manuscripts of both this Almeida and the 2006 National Theatre version. All quotations are from these manuscripts.
5 Translated by David Edgar from a literal translation by Deborah Gearing, The Life of Galileo, November 2005, 92. I am very grateful to David Edgar for the provision of this unpublished manuscript. All quotations are from it.
times compared to,” but didn’t realise until he agreed to undertake the commission, “what an insight it would prove into the minds of the previous translators” (“Translating Galileo”) Edgar’s thoughts on the earlier versions are very similar to those expounded by McNeill as a result of his detailed and invaluable analysis of the English translations from 1947 to 1994:

It’s principally about the times in which they wrote them. In Brecht’s hands, a play celebrating scientific rationality changed into a play calling for social responsibility. Brenton’s Galileo was written at one of the hottest moments in the cold war, when the newly-elected Reagan and Thatcher administrations moved perilously close to the nuclear trigger. Brenton felt the need to counter Galileo’s pessimism about his battle with the authorities with the optimism of his intelligence, clear-sightedness and lust for life (hence Brenton’s insistence on the production playing the whole of the last scene, in which Galileo’s book is smuggled ‘across a border to us, in the future’). For Hare, working on the play after the fall of communism, Galileo’s recantation is at the heart of a moral debate about how individuals should behave. Brenton dramatises a battle: Hare orchestrates an argument. (“Translating Galileo”)

In constructing a version suitable for the 300 seater Almeida, Hare was always likely to produce a more chamber version of the play, and this is reflected in the set deployed: basically a set of folding and openable screens placed on a floor with eight painted geometric circles (presumably representing the doomed eight crystal spheres). However, this scaling down extended beyond the formal details of the set. By a considerable degree of cutting, the playing time (stripped of the interval) was barely two hours; but more than this what Hare wanted was, in his own words,

to find a way of somehow traveling to Renaissance Italy without passing through Berlin. My ambition was to release the play from the memory of the [Berliner] Ensemble. In slightly disencumbering the play’s story-line, in expanding certain passages and emphasising certain others, in cutting the odd character and occasionally clarifying the play’s rhetoric, I was also choosing to join the long line of

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6 I am grateful to the Theatre Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum for enabling me to refresh my memories of the production by screening for me a DVD of the performance of 28 March 1994.
contributors and colleagues who have sought to balance out the almost impossible richness of theme in the original subject matter. (Hare, “Universal Quality”)

In other words, it was far more of a re-working of the original than Brenton’s version: it could almost be argued that it was ‘based on’ rather than ‘adapted from’ Brecht’s play, though this would be to somewhat overstate the case. Releasing the play from the memory of the Ensemble meant, amongst other things, a rejection of the introductory paraphernalia to each scene in favour of period sounding music, but above all it meant the deployment of a more naturalistic acting style. In Richard Griffith’s schoolmasterly hands (and this before The History Boys had beckoned, although it is not hard to see how his depiction of Galileo might have served as his audition piece), Galileo became less specific to any particular time, and more the portrait of a great man with moral problems. In Hare’s words again:

Science is only the ostensible subject of the play. Through all the long history of the play’s rewriting, Brecht’s principal aim was to show the behaviour of a man who comes to realise that he is ethically unequipped to deal with the consequences of his own genius. Galileo is a man who meets a test and fails. He is also able to understand the meaning of that failure better than anyone. Brecht’s own genius is to turn the tragedy outwards and to ask how things might have been otherwise. (Hare, “Universal Quality”)

The use of the word ‘tragedy’ is indicative of the way in which Hare sought consciously to work against a materialist construction of the narrative.

Approaching the task in 2005, David Edgar consciously seeks to re-contextualise the play, arguing that, “the biggest change in the past decade is that organised, traditional religion is now on a roll, providing sustenance and certainty to people who have lost confidence in earthly solutions to human problems (including scientific ones)” (“The Italian Job”). Historically, this goes completely against Brecht’s own diktat that

it would be highly dangerous, particularly nowadays, to treat a matter like Galileo’s fight for freedom of research as a religious one: for thereby attention would be most unhappily deflected from present-day reactionary authorities of a totally unecclesiastical kind. (Brecht, “Portrayal” 217)
But then, Brecht was writing in the very different context of 1939. Edgar deliberately rejected previous translations in their playing down of the power of the reactionary clerics [...] in an age when the case for faith is trumpeted not just from cathedrals, temples and mosques but from 10 Downing St and the White House. So, yes, the church’s arguments must have stature, and the audience should be borne along by arguments for faith in the mouths of monks and peasants. But it’s more important than ever to note that, in the mouths of Inquisitors, the same arguments are used to justify forcing Galileo to declare that the earth stands still.” (Edgar, “‘Translating’ Galileo”)

In other words, different though Edgar’s adaptation is to Brenton’s – and it is in many ways even more stripped down than Hare’s 1994 version, including the removal of the fight between the young Medici Prince and Andrea – it shares with the latter the recognition that, whatever may be made of Galileo’s recantation, some positive end was achieved in the face of the authorities’ oppression.

Now, clearly this is a massive area for debate and I have only begun to touch on some of the major differences between the various translations and, to an even lesser extent, the purpose and significance of these differences. What I now want to do is to consider David Hare’s revisiting of the play at the National Theatre, and then to look at the significance of just one of these differences, these alterations, in the various versions on offer.

I want to look at the most recent production in part not only because it is the most recent but also – taking in to account Hare’s alterations (realised in performance and not) from the Almeida production – because its placement at the National Theatre provides a way of making connections and disconnections precisely because it is located there, the consciously constructed crossroads where British theatre meets, or at least should meet, Europe and the wider world.

It is the year 2006. A man walks on to a stage, settles himself, and lights a cigarette. Sensing an audience, he turns and speaks: “For two thousand years men have believed that the sun and all the stars revolve
around mankind,” and suddenly we are back nearly four centuries to 1609, in Padua as it happens, which is just as well, for, given that he is garbed in contemporary dress, if the place had been, for example, Edinburgh rather than London, he would be in danger of legal sanctions for lighting up on stage. The use of contemporary costume makes the contrast with the religious figures the more acute: that they are still dressed much as they always have been both contrasts strongly with the sense of, in particular, Galileo as a modernist protagonist, as well as signifying the historically arcane nature of the authorities. The move away from the kind of representation of seventeenth century dress of Hare’s first adaptation is not the only difference, however.

The simple set of the Almeida production has given way to a sophisticated open domed structure, with the revolve being used to designate moves from interior locations, to anterooms, courtyards and the like. Indeed, everything about the new production is on a larger scale. Although the production did not restore the verses at the beginning of each scene, in the manuscript (though not in the theatre programme), Hare does reinstate the full Brechtian title accounts of each scene.

What is more, Brecht’s ballad singer scene – rendered rather limply in 1994 with Galileo starring in a kind of Punch and Judy puppet show – is now replaced with a full-scale twentieth century cabaret with as many echoes of Bob Fosse as of Brecht’s Baal, in which, particularly with the interventions of the “ballad singer’s wife,” a far stronger sense of the potentially populist and subversive significance of Galileo’s work is demonstrated.

Hare made one particularly significant other change. One of the key differences between Brecht’s 1937 original and Laughton/Brecht’s 1945 version is that the latter excised the two scenes set in Florence during the plague. They were put back in the 1955 ‘Berliner Ensemble’ version and duly appear in Vesey’s translation. The first scene is set in Galileo’s study: Virginia arrives to announce that “the convent has closed” because of the plague, and Galileo tells Mrs Sarti to pack and take his

7 I am grateful to the archives of the National Theatre for allowing me to refresh my memories of the production with a viewing of the DVD of the live performance.
daughter and Andrea to Bologna, a servant of the Medici prince immedi-
ately entering to tell them that a carriage will shortly be at the door. 
Galileo refuses to leave his work at a critical time, and Mrs Sarti returns to look after him. We had already learned from the court officials in the previous scene that, “The medical faculty declare it impossible for the sickness in the Old Town to be cases of plague... Nothing but the epidemic of colds usual at this time of year... Everything’s perfectly all right” (Vesey 49). The establishment experts had yet another thing wrong. Curiously, Hare had omitted both the scene and the previous mention of the plague in 1993. Even more curiously, in 2006 he included the scene but not the section in the preceding scene. However, he never arrived at the position in which Brenton had found himself in 1980. Determined to offer a version of the complete 1955 text, Brenton included not only this scene but the next related one which is set outside Galileo’s house in Florence. Galileo addresses two nuns, asking where he might get milk. They cross themselves and hurry away from the plague-ridden street. His baker tells him that he does not know where his housekeeper, Mrs Sarti is, and a woman tells him that she has collapsed in the street. Soldiers push Galileo back into his house with lances, and Galileo tells the old woman: “I reproach myself for not having sent my housekeeper away in time. I had urgent work, but she had no reason to stay” (Vesey 59).

Galileo is frightened that he will starve, and the old woman promises a jug of milk under cover of darkness. At this point, Andrea arrives, having walked for three days after jumping from the carriage. Galileo’s excited account of the discoveries that he has made about Venus is countered by Andrea’s worries about his sick mother who he has tried in vain to visit. Galileo insists quietly: “I didn’t keep her here,” to which Andrea offers no response, and Galileo continues, “But of course if I hadn’t stayed, it wouldn’t have happened” (Vesey 61). Two carefully muffled men enter, passing out bread on long sticks to them, and Galileo asks if they can bring him a book he needs tomorrow. One of the men laughs scornfully and the scene ends with the old woman placing the promised jug of milk by the door.

This scene does not get added by Hare in 2006, and it might as well not have been in the 1980 production for, though Brenton won the
argument with Dexter over the inclusion of the final scene, the director absolutely insisted on the cutting of the two plague scenes, which thus appeared in the published script (with the mention of the plague in the preceding scene) but not in performance. Dexter argued that “It was interrupting the flow of the narrative” (Hiley 66), but – although this may well have been the motivation for the cut, a desire to move events quickly towards the crisis of the Inquisition and the recantation – it has other effects. In 2005, Edgar also took out these scenes and all mention of the plague but, in correspondence with me, he is far blunter about his reasoning:

I decided to cut the plague scenes for two reasons. I wanted the play to be short and crisp, so that people would come out saying, ‘I thought Brecht was supposed to be heavy, long and Teutonic’. I also feel that the plague scenes make Galileo both too heroic (risking his life) and too uncaring (risking Mrs Sarti’s).8

Edgar’s points about Galileo and Mrs Sarti are important in any consideration of these scenes. The astronomer does ignore the dangers of the plague in order to continue with his work. That is to say, unlike his experiences of being shown the instruments of the Inquisition, he is prepared to risk death for the sake of his research. And this is not the only parallel that can be drawn. In the penultimate scene we learn that not only has he managed to continue with his work after his house imprisonment, but he has a copy of the Discorsi ready for Andrea to take away. If we turn to Brecht’s 1938 first draft of the play, as The Earth Moves, we find that scene 4 with the confrontation between Galileo and the court scholars was completed with what becomes the first of the plague scenes; and, in the second one, the returned Andrea is told that his mother is dead9 (This was, however, soon changed.

What are we to make of all this? Well, the second plague scene is the sole one involving Galileo that actually goes on to the streets where he not only meets the ordinary people that are made so much of by Galileo and by the play, but they treat him decently, providing him with food and drink. And this is, of course, Mrs Sarti’s explanation of her return in

8 Unpublished correspondence from David Edgar April 2008.
9 See the editorial note in Brecht, Collected Plays, V, 275-276.
the first scene: “But who would prepare your food for you?” (Vesey 57). Many have written – including Brecht himself – about the connection between Galileo’s appetite for ideas and his appetite for food, and I do not intend to add to this critical larder. However, Brecht’s reprieve of Mrs Sarti does create a strong stress on the inter-relationship of Galileo and his daughter and Sarti and her son. There is no evidence of them as a complete family unit – though she does use the familiar German ‘du’ when she is mad at him – but generally in the play Galileo treats her son more like his, and Sarti treats his daughter more like hers.\(^\text{10}\) What these scenes do create, though, is a more humane image of Galileo. The possibility of heroism on his part is always countered by his realisation of the danger that he has placed Sarti in. Somewhere, at the centre of this history of adaptations and contestations, there really is the possibility of a Galileo and his children.

Now, clearly, the inclusion of these scenes does much more than slow down the pace of the narrative and, ironically, would have made Dexter’s quasi-biographical reading of the play the easier to accept. The fact that each of three British playwrights whose variants on the play I have looked at should have consciously considered the inclusion or exclusion of these scenes, in whole or in part, means that the final decision is at least as important a part of the process of adaptation as the various other components (stage design, choice of dialect, etc). For, this absent presence is something that complicates the issues. When Jonathan Kent directed Hare’s first version of *Galileo* – incidentally the very first Brecht he had directed, and with a rehearsal period of less than one month – he stated his desire “to make the play as clear as possible rather than doctrinaire” (qtd. in Eddershaw 156). However, when considering a (partial) removal of these scenes and their implications, we become aware that the dichotomy – clarity versus the doctrinaire – is not the real one. Indeed, for many hostile critics, Brecht’s clarity has been precisely connected with an ideologically doctrinaire position. In his criticism of *The Measures Taken*, Ronald Gray, for example, argues: “Brecht’s loaded

\(^{10}\) Consider, for instance, Galileo’s relationship with Andrea in the opening scene, and Mrs Sarti’s enthusiastic help for Virginia’s wedding, an event largely ignored and eventually accidentally prevented by him.
interpretation, conveyed through the ‘Kontrollchor’ shows no open mind: he has simply decided to construct a scene and inform his audience that it proves the point he wants to make” (51). The actual dichotomy is far more straightforward, between simplicity and complication/ambiguity or whatever. By the time Brecht came to write the play – and by this we must mean the time period during which the play was shaped and altered – the already complicated questions of ideology and of individuality were becoming more difficult, and his own efforts/struggles with these scenes serve to reinforce that sense of tension. To simply remove them in the cause of creating a greater clarity is to do both the play and the playwright a considerable disservice. Jan Needle and Peter Thomson express the dilemma well:

To follow its metamorphoses from the first draft [on]... is to watch at work a playwright who never rested on his laurels. It is also to observe that peculiarly Brechtian balance of power between the right word and the right stage business. *Galileo* is one of the great battlefields of a conflict Brecht could not resolve. Instead, he came to accept it as the dialectical aspect of his dramaturgy. On the one hand was the reactionary theatre, with its love of crisis and climax: on the other was the epic theatre, where each verbal transaction, however “cool”, illustrates the social *Gestus* that is its *raison d’être*. (170)

What this ultimately means is that there is absolutely no way in which Brecht’s text can be either read or used as a dogmatic/doctrinaire progress through crisis to resolution. The root of Brenton, Hare and Edgar’s willingness/desire to tackle *Galileo* thus lies in a realisation that, in seeking to adapt the play in response to their individual senses of a changing modern world, they are engaging with a play that is already a model of adaptation. This is one of the many aspects of *Galileo* that makes it such a crucial part of the Brecht canon, and it is one of the many things that makes the adaptations of these three contemporary British playwrights so important and so fascinating.
Works Cited

Primary Sources


Secondary Sources


II. Staging the Page: Intertextuality
Performative Acts:
Translating for the Theatre

1. The State of Play

The role translation and adaptation play in theatre and drama, particularly in the formation of dramatic and theatrical tradition, has been underestimated by both theatre studies as well as translation studies. Recent developments in translation studies have seen an increase in studies investigating translational activities for the stage (cf. Aaltonen, Anderman, Krebs, Upton), yet these works are presented more often than not as tangential and of specialist interest only, rather than as an integral part of the discourse surrounding the more and more complex notion and theorising of translation as practice and process. While translation studies seems to be currently quite rightly concerned with the development of a less Anglo-American or Western-centric approach to the study of translation (cf. Hermans), the examination of translation activity in a theatrical context may offer a valuable example of a translation process which challenges the so-called ‘black box’ presupposition so common in Western translation theory:¹

[…] an individual translator decodes a given message to be translated and recodes the same message in a second language. […] This view of translation practice does not reflect the full range worldwide and may not even be the dominant

¹ Describing a definition as ‘Western’ is, of course, problematic in itself. For a more detailed discussion of issues involved in such nomenclature see Maria Tymoczko “Reconceptualizing Western Translation Theory.”
mode crossculturally. (Tymoczko, “Reconceptualizing Western Translation Theory” 18)

By its very nature, translation for the theatre does not follow such a practice. Instead, it is shaped by a creative process that is not reliant upon one person’s contribution but upon groups of people working together. Whether the translational process is characterised by the grouping of playwright and so-called ‘literal’ translator, very common in the Anglo-American context, or whether the translation is shaped and formed by a rehearsal process, translation for theatrical production can rarely, if at all, be described as a ‘black box’ decoding process.2

Theatre studies in Britain has not paid much attention to translation as a creative dramatic or theatrical practice. Concerned with establishing distance between itself and literary studies as an academic discipline coupled with an embrace of the myth of equivalence, this scholarly field rarely acknowledges translation as a politically and ideologically charged creative process of rewriting. To some extent, theatre studies, in the UK at least, continues to perpetuate the notion of the omnipresent author in relation to both the dramatic texts3 and to the subsequent hierarchical relationship between translation and ‘original,’ whereby translation is either seen as interchangeable with its source or as a “necessary evil, inferior to the original” (Minier 60). Not only is theatre studies guilty of such an attitude toward translation but it seems commonplace and an integral part of authoritative practices of Western discourse (cf. Minier).

Furthermore, translation as dramatic and theatrical practice makes visible the blurred, or even non-existent, boundaries between adaptation and translation. Any attempt at a clear distinction between adaptation and translation as product is bound to run into serious difficulties, not just because the differentiation between the two seems, at times, an emotional and legal minefield (cf. Venuti “Adaptation, Translation,

2 These two examples of translational practice in the theatre are, of course, not mutually exclusive, nor do they exhaust the variations possible in the creative rewriting of text for performance.

3 This attitude is visible not necessarily in performance practices but in canonical theatre histories and textbooks produced by the academy (cf. Innes, Thomson, Zarilli et al.).
Critique”). In an environment based upon equivalence and the necessary evil of translation, adaptation seems to allow a text to claim at least a certain degree of creative ownership. It also allows critics of a target text to denote it as a ‘mere’ adaptation if it does not fulfil the expectations of a devotee of the source. Theoretically, however, both these positions find themselves on somewhat thin ice as adaptation and translation are not a-priori concepts independent from contemporaneous attitudes and discourses. Instead, they reflect the changing nature of translation discourse as well as of notions of authorship and creative practice. For example, the decision to label a text a translation instead of an adaptation was subject to very different reasoning before and after the introduction of international copy-right by the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works in 1886 (cf. Venuti The Translator’s Invisibility, Krebs).

Susan Bassnett deals with this dilemma by stating categorically that it is a nonsense to distinguish between translation and adaptation (10). A more measured and constructive response is found in Heinz Kosok who argues that adaptation and translation are not binary opposites but rather that “one can indeed identify a scale of versions which in different degrees are closer to, or distanced from, the source text” (115). The debate continues, and Manuela Perthegella’s attempt at providing a definition of adaptation, despite the impossibility to define its relation to translation, will most likely not be the last:

Adaptation here refers to a textual-translatory activity, which aims to recontextualize the globality of the source language playtext into new aesthetic and political configurations, within localized target cultures (interculturalism) or within a transnationally shared context (transculturalism). By so doing, adaptation both as process and as product, critically supplements the source with subjective and cultural interpretations. (Perthegella 63)

While an unambiguous definition of translation and adaptation is impossible – Kosok’s notion of closeness is as problematic as Perthegella’s implication that it is a defining characteristic of adaptation to be critical and subjective – this chapter will rely on an appropriation of Wolfgang Iser’s (145) definition of interpretation, as translation and adaptation are, arguably, examples of both interpretation and reception. A useful definition then which does not rely on notions of closeness,
critique or even equivalence and fidelity may read as follows: Translation is an act of interpretation, the execution of which depends on the subject matter as well as on the context within which the activity takes place. Consequently, they are only variables of translation conceived as (re)iterations of discursive conventions.

Thus, the framework on which the following argument is built rests on three principles: to challenge theatre studies’ reluctance to engage with translation as a creative theatrical practice; to address theatre translations’ marginal role and tangential position within translation studies; and not to rely upon an emotive or ambiguous distinction between adaptation and translation.

By examining theatre translation in light of theoretical concerns surrounding the notion of performativity, this chapter argues that a Butlerian approach to performativity is particularly useful when examining translation and adaptation for the stage as forms of practice which have the ability not only to confirm dominant ideology but also to resist and challenge it. Furthermore, such emphasis on the theatrical as opposed to the dramatic may indeed offer insights into translation which not only elucidate theatrical practice and tradition but also bring valuable elements to the theorising of translation as process and product itself.

2. Translation, Performance and Performativity

2.1 Translation and Performance

Translation and Performance share a number of theoretical as well as creative concerns and positions. For example, both acts, or rather processes, can be characterised as a conscious struggle to become the unobtainable other, and the realization of the impossibility of such an effort is an experience both the performer and the translator, rather than the reader or the spectator, encounter repeatedly throughout their respective creative careers.

Of course, this characterisation of both performance and translation is steeped in the realist paradigm: an understanding and expectation of performance which – whether the production as a whole adheres to realist conventions or not – aims to make a suspension of disbelief possible through a realist engagement with character. Similarly, such a
perception of translation implies an act which forever strives for equivalence, and as such has its own limitations in as much as it ignores instances of translation where an adherence to equivalence or even fidelity may not necessarily be their raison d’être.

Apart from positions based on such a realist paradigm, translation and performance share an inherent tension between the reinforcement of domestic cultural and political assumptions on the one hand and the possibility of challenging those assumptions by providing alternatives on the other. A concern with these tensions is also typical of the discussion and analysis of both the acts of translation as well as the acts of performance (cf. Carlson, Johnston, Phelan, Tymoczko “Ideology and the Position of the Translator”). Arguably, such tensions become visible in the performance of translation and adaptation.

For example, some of the reactions to the performance of The PowerBook (Royal National Theatre, 2002), a stage adaptation of Jeanette Winterson’s novel of the same title, demonstrate such tension. The production attempted to stray from the realist mode of performance expected by an audience in the National Theatre in order to create a markedly theatrical version of the source novel. The production received mixed responses from reviewers which nevertheless show certain tendencies in line with the inherent tensions of such theatrical challenge and adaptive reinforcement. Some critics appreciate the poetic nature of the performance – something one might expect from a congenial adaptation of a Winterson novel – others are disappointed by an apparent lack of theatricality which hints at a horizon of expectation that is as much linked to the names attached to the production (such as “the terrible twins,” Fiona Shaw and Deborah Warner), as to the location of the production, the National Theatre. Michael Coveney, theatre critic for the Daily Mail, complains that “[i]nstead of inventing a

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4 The performance of The PowerBook was directed by Deborah Warner and devised by Jeannette Winterson, Deborah Warner and Fiona Shaw for the Royal National Theatre in 2002.

5 Due to their long standing theatrical collaboration, Fiona Shaw and Deborah Warner are often mentioned under the epithet “the terrible twins” (see Coen 1997, Parry 2002 and Monks 2003).
dramatic text from Winterson, we have a mere re-hash in another dimension” (54) and he perceives the re-telling of legends, so crucial to the novel and the production, as awkward. Moreover, Coveney states that “the decadent, quasi-experimental atmosphere […] is a sure sign of having nothing to say” (54). On the other hand, some critics applaud the performance as something which “captures Winterson’s rare, strange, lyric eloquence” (de Jongh) and “the quality of writing […] [as] sinuous, athletic, subversive and occasionally undermined by the triviality of what is being said” (Peter).

2.2 Translation and Performativity

Performativity is a notoriously difficult term to define considering the multitude of its usage:

The concept of performativity has been invoked often in perfunctory or incompatible ways […] it [also] ensured that the arcane details of speech act theory became the testing grounds […] for the competing claims of the Anglo-American and ‘continental’ approaches to philosophy. (Loxley 1-2)

Not only does the concept bear witness to a notorious argument between Jacques Derrida and John Searle,6 performativity is also often conflated with ‘performable’ and/or ‘performance’ (cf. Shepherd and Wallis). As a result, a discussion of performativity as a defining characteristic of theatre translation may help not only to establish it as an important cultural, political and creative practice but also to distinguish more clearly between performance and performativity.

A performative act, as opposed to a performance, is a speech act which exerts a binding power.

It is through the invocation of convention that the speech act […] derives its binding power; that binding power is to be found neither in the subject of the judge nor in his will, but in the citational legacy by which a contemporary ‘act’ emerges in the context of a chain of binding conventions. (Butler 225)

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6 For a more detailed discussion of this philosophers’ ‘spat’ see Loxley and Maclean.
Similarly to the sentencing or pronouncing by a judge used by Butler (following Austin) as an example of a speech act which exerts a binding power, translation and adaptation exist only in the context of a chain of binding conventions which they invoke and (re)iterate.

The performance of a translated or adapted play necessarily always makes visible the discursive conventions a translation or adaptation (re)iterates. Thus, by making visible (re)iterations, or indeed performative acts inherent within such acts of rewriting, the performance of translations and adaptations have the potential to be as subversive as a drag act. Butler’s notion of the “critically queer” (cf. 1993) is, of course, based upon the fundamental binary oppositions of sex and gender, which Butler exposes as cultural constructs of identity. Although it may be presumptuous to draw parallels between the critically queer and translation and adaptation, as argued above and elsewhere, translation stands in a similarly fundamental opposition to the notion of ‘original’ text and ‘original’ authorship, and it seems the level of such ‘originality’ lies at the bottom of the discussions surrounding the distinction of adaptation from translation.

As feminist-oriented Translation Studies has pointed out, woman and translation – two ungraspable, unfixable, and thus, despised others – are theoretically in analogy with one another: ‘the original is considered the strong, generative male, the translation the weaker and derivative female’ (Simon 1996, p. 1). (Minier 60)

The performative act as translational act is, similarly to the performative act as bodily act, non-referential as neither the translational act nor the bodily act refer to “pre-existing conditions, such as an inner essence, substance or being” (Fischer-Lichte 27). As the discussion surrounding adaptation, translation and the notions of original briefly summarised above demonstrates, there is no fixed or stable identity or definition of a translation. What is regarded a translation or indeed adaptation does

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7 Translation studies has long struggled with a definition of translation and the current debate critiquing Western-centric approaches to the study of translation bears witness to this dilemma. It is Gideon Toury’s target-orientated definition which is probably most useful here: “[A] translation will be taken to be any target-language utterance which is presented or regarded as such within the target culture” (20).
not precede or follow a definition. Instead, the translational act, process and product, has the capacity to collapse dichotomies not only of translation and original, but also of embodiment and norms of representation. Thus, not only has the performance of translation the potential to make visible the tensions between reinforcement and challenge of cultural assumptions, it can also be a resource for subversion.

2.3 Performed Translation as Critically Queer?

Butler identifies the drag act as a resource for the subversion of a dominant gender ontology whereby the drag act, as a performance of gender, can be “a challenge to the whole way in which categories of identity are organised, an exposure of the underlying performativity of gender” (Loxley 141). By its very existence as process and as product, a translation or adaptation arguably performs notions of ‘original,’ ‘authorship’ and dramatic norms. It is the performance of a translation or adaptation, however, which has the subversive potential to expose the underlying performativity of theatrical interpretation, representation and embodiment.

In other words, “as soon as performativity comes to rest on performance, questions of embodiment, of social relations, of ideological interpolations, of emotional and political effects all become discussable” (Diamond 2-5, cited in Shepherd and Wallis 223). It is ‘questions of embodiment’ which are particularly interesting in relation to theatre translation as translations and adaptations for the stage necessitate a critical engagement with the norms of embodiment within both the source and target cultures. The act, or rather the process, of translation reveals conventions of embodiment if only to rewrite them into another set of conventions. By interrupting our automatic immersion in these conventions, such rewriting will necessarily conjure, make visible, invoke such conventions, and thus can have a subversive function.

What can be observed in translations in general and translations for the stage in particular is an invocation of convention – a citation of norms already in existence. The translation, by rewriting into a target culture and the contemporaneous theatrical context of such a culture, always invokes “the chain of binding conventions” (Butler 225). It is the
Harley Granville Barker, when translating Arthur Schnitzler’s *Anatol*, expanded the source text’s stage directions from a simple ‘in the drawing room’ to quasi novelistic descriptions of environment and character. George Bernard Shaw, a contemporary of Barker’s who was about to establish his way of writing plays as a binding convention in the UK, is probably the most notable example of long, prose stage directions which themselves are part of the chain of conventions which established the realist mode on the British stage in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Thus, Barker’s published, translated text invokes a convention-to-be but it is the performance of the translated text which introduces and thus establishes a psychological realism in acting that deviated from the nineteenth-century norm of performance and mode of representation.

Of course, translation’s ability to invoke and performance’s ability to make visible hegemonic discourses, norms and conventions of embodiment, do not automatically lead to subversion. Similarly, drag is “not unproblematically subversive […], there is no guarantee that exposing the naturalized status [… ] will lead to its subversion” (Butler 231).

The reception of Fiona Shaw in *The PowerBook* leaves no doubt that the performance itself questioned norms of representation and conventions of embodiment, and it left some of the audience struggling with the gulf between their expectation and their experience. Shaw, best known as a virtuous classical actress who has been celebrated in roles as diverse as Hedda Gabler (1991), Richard II (1995) and Aunt Petunia in the film adaptations of the *Harry Potter* series, brings an alienated, or indeed alienating, strategy of acting to the role of the narrator in the adaptation of Winterson’s novel. Expecting psychological realism as the mode of performance rather than allowing a conscious awkwardness to be an acceptable form of representation, Shaw’s performance is judged by some critics as “a mess” (Wolf), and comparisons with former roles come to the conclusion that “not since Rudolf Nureyev’s final years have I seen a soloist in worse condition. […] her voice loses its texture and affecting resonance; and her old musicality is gone” (Macaulay). The attempt by Winterson, Warner and Shaw to expose the naturalized
status of a psychological realism approach to staging was successful, yet it is a point of contention whether the production also reversed discursive convention. The postmodern, eclectic and fragmentary style of the performance was dismissed by some critics while celebrated by others. Winterson made an effort to stress in the programme accompanying the production that her work “sits better in the European tradition of Borges and Calvino, than it does in the Anglo-American tradition of realism and narrative.” The *PowerBook* was able to make visible hegemonic discourse and had every intention to be subversive, yet the techniques employed by the production failed to some extent in as much as they allowed the performance to be dismissed by some as a blip in all three women’s career trajectories. On the other hand, the production’s experimental nature was appreciated by some as “exploring the fine line between fiction, theatre and realism” (Foss) and for offering a blurring of gender boundaries. For example, the fact that we see a female actor on the stage performing the author character should not unquestionably mean that the performance portrays a lesbian relationship. The writer character chooses not to tell the client if their name, Ali, is the name of a male or female person. Having this role assigned to a female actor may underline the lesbian theme (which is frequent in Winterson’s oeuvre) but it does not need to narrow down the interpretation. When reading the novel, this aspect is very much open to interpretation, and the stage version also retains this ambiguity by keeping this element of the dialogue in.

A quite different example of a performance of a translation which makes visible hegemonic discourse and norms of representation without being subversive is David Hare’s *The Blue Room.*,8 Hare’s 1999 stage version of Arthur Schnitzler’s *Reigen* claims to be a “free adaptation” and is obviously indebted to Max Ophüls’s film *La Ronde* (1950). Hare’s translation and, more importantly, the production, directed by Sam Mendes and starring Nicole Kidman and Ian Glen, make visible

8 *The Blue Room* is an example of the prevalent Anglo-American practice to credit a known playwright with a translation even though the script has grown out of a collaboration between playwright and translator or is a rewrite of already existing versions in the target language.
discursive conventions of contemporary British theatre. The performance is a two-hander and star vehicle demonstrating the trend of the 1990s whereby famous film actors and directors participate in the West End theatre landscape in London in order to increase their cultural capital. The radical element of the production is perceived to be Kidman’s nudity – even ten years after the event the Daily Telegraph refers to her performance as “pure theatrical viagra” (Walker) – and the play’s potentially subversive discussion of sexuality and gender has been somewhat neutralised. This performance, although exposing discursive convention and naturalized modes of representation by inviting comparison not only with Schnitzler’s Reigen but also Ophüls’s La Ronde, is not subversive; nor is it a consciously intercultural encounter as Hare is at pains to emphasize the process of indigenization the play has undergone. Even though the performance itself does not exploit translation’s ability to challenge, but rather relies upon its potential to reinforce, a study of this translation in performance exposes the hegemonic discourse of a national tradition.

3. Conclusion

To what extent does this discussion add anything to our understanding and conceptualizing of processes and products of translation and adaptation? Is there a need to look at the performance of translation in order to gain insight into norms of representation, citations, reiterations or indeed challenges to convention? From choice of texts to translate or adapt to the use of specific translation techniques, the translated play tends to tell us as much if not more about the target culture than the source culture. The reception of the work by both critics and audiences allows us to gain a further understanding of the target culture and as Sirkku Aaltonen so poignantly states: “Often when we believe we have caught a glimpse of the Other we have only seen a reflection in the mirror” (112).

However, arguably there is a doubling at work as the target text is a hybrid text, preserving traces of the translator(s) and the source-text author(s) and citing the target culture and the source culture simultaneously. This hybridity allows the process of translation to be at once a performative act, reiterating hegemonic discourses, and also theatrical in
the Butlerian sense “to the extent that it mimes [...] the discursive convention” (232, emphasis in original). Only through its performance, however, can the hyperbolic gesture which is “crucial to the exposure” and the reversal of “discursive convention” (Butler 232) be developed.

According to Butler, the performative norm is a form of compulsion and ‘bodies’ suffer under the weight of the conventions that they are brought to repeat. This is, of course, also the case for translations and adaptations as seen in the examples above. Yet, the hybrid nature of these texts can take the first steps towards subversion, which is the recognition and subsequent exposition of naturalized modes of embodiment.

In *The Radical in Performance*, Baz Kershaw raises an important question: “how can performance, in being always already implicated in the dominant, avoid replicating the values of the dominant?” (70) And he seems to provide the answer: “[…] deconstructive techniques […] aim to resist the ways in which dominant ideologies have been inscribed in the performative by mainstream traditions” (70). The performance of translations and adaptations offers ways not only to resist but also to subvert the performative – sometimes more successfully as other times as the examples above demonstrate. Thus, this approach may allow us first of all to acknowledge translation for the stage as creative theatrical practice and, secondly, to add it to the techniques which can resist, subvert and be theorized as such.

Works Cited

*Primary Literature*


**Secondary Literature**


Translating for the Theatre

Playing the Novel: A Partial and Promotional Survey of Recent Methodologies of Stage Adaptations

In 1991, as a Christmas present to its readers, the *Guardian* invited each of its critics to list their “pet hates.” Michael Billington, the theatre editor, selected novel adaptation as his principal bugbear:

I dislike all theatrical adaptations of classic novels except *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. I reserve the right to stay away indefinitely from all cut-up versions of Dickens, Austen, Fielding, Thackeray, Hardy, Dostoevsky, Flaubert, Balzac and any of the all-time greats. My most exquisite reason? They reduce great fiction to bare-bones melodrama, eliminate irony, authorial vision and the transforming effect of time, and – most serious of all – are gradually supplanting new work on the British stage. To hell with them! (Billington)

This essay is partly a riposte to Billington’s (vaguely ironic) hyperbole. In considering a range of adaptations over the last thirty years, I will attempt to determine to what extent a dramatisation inevitably diminishes its prose source, and how far adroit theatrical innovation, on the part of the adapter and the production team, can shift narrative so effectively into another genre that charges of “melodrama” and lack of

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1 This is a heavily edited version of the original, 90 minute conference workshop, which included performed extracts from three of Michael Fry’s own adaptations, and a longer introductory section.
“authorial vision” become largely inconsequential. While there are numerous cases of slapdash and exploitative adaptations, produced largely for pragmatic reasons of marketing, I make no apologies for my partiality towards the principle of adaptation, having written and directed a number of them. I also argue that adaptation has, further, been at the forefront of some of the major developments in contemporary British theatre.

During the first part of this talk I will refer to various methodologies espoused by some of the bolder adapters. In the second part I discuss my adaptation of *The Great Gatsby*, to try to convey the challenges an adapter faces in the transference of story and character from one genre to another, and some of my own resolutions to these problems.

Christopher Hampton, whose adaptation receives the back-handed compliment from Billington, hardly returns the favour, declaring that “asking a writer what he thinks about critics is like asking a lamp-post what it thinks about dogs” (Francis 7). David Edgar has similarly articulated the bigotry experienced by playwrights who decide to dramatise a novel. Discussing the reaction to *Nicholas Nickleby*, he writes:

I met the full force of the prejudice that has always existed against the transformation of literature from one medium to another. My work, I was told, had ceased to be “original”. It was assumed I was only doing it for the money, or that I was “marking time” while I developed a “proper idea”. In fact I think the adaptations I have done are all real plays, and should be judged as such. (Edgar)

Helen Edmundson also dislikes the distinction made between her adaptive and her non-adaptive plays, pointing out that her adaptations involve just as much originality of thought and planning.²

While Edmundson, Edgar and Hampton are three of the more distinguished British adapters, a number of theatre directors with no claims to be writers, have produced equally lucid and imaginative adaptations. Mike Alfreds was pivotal in the revival of the genre with his founding of Shared Experience in 1970, and during his 33 years at Glasgow Citizens Theatre Giles Havergal’s adaptive work was often among the most vibrant theatre to be found in Britain. Alfreds’s experiments with

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² In a discussion chaired by the author at East 15, 13 March 2008.
narrative and storytelling had a crucial impact on *Nicholas Nickleby* (which in turn, according to Trevor Nunn, directly affected his [Nunn’s] later, and prevailing, work on *Cats* and *Les Misérables*). Companies such as Cheek by Jowl, DV8 and ATC, which do not particularly specialise in adaptive work, have nevertheless all acknowledged their debt to Alfréd. Arguably the most stimulating productions during the past ten years have been the work (principally adaptive) of Simon McBurney at Complicite, Phelim McDermott with Improbable and Emma Rice at Kneehigh, where the director is seen as – if not the author – at least as the auteur.

Many playwrights today remain hidebound by a naturalistic, visually inspired style that does not give credence to the elements of design and lighting, music and sound, ensemble acting and direct address that only theatre can offer. Adaptations tend to make flagrant use of these components: because the structure and storytelling methods of prose fiction are different from those used on stage, the adapter is continually obliged to ponder fresh strategies and re-evaluate theatricality. “There is something about using non-dramatic material that forces you to think differently,” says Alfréd. A study of adaptations over the past hundred years offers a revealing history of the conventions of the theatre of their times, and perhaps accounts for the reason why adaptations date more quickly than some other plays. Even the BBC, on both radio and television, is happy to commission a new adaptation of the same work every ten years or so, because tastes, contemporary relevance and attention spans all move on surprisingly quickly.

Paradoxically, whereas the BBC now seems to demand some attention-grabbing twenty-first century pointers (or nudity) in its adaptations, they remain, on the whole, conventional period pieces. Stage adaptations, on the other hand, have proved shrewder at marrying tonal fidelity with rousing modern analogies.

Fidelity is an impossible issue to quantify. Since a reader’s response to a work of fiction is inescapably subjective, whatever an adapter does with their treatment is likely to perturb a section of the audience. Unless

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3 Interview with the author, 11 June 2006.
the adapter has the luxury of *Nicholas Nickleby*'s eight and a half hours playing time; they are unlikely to reproduce every detail and plot-line. Some adapters have attempted, with a fair degree of success, to give the audience an experience analogous to that of reading the novel. Peter Hall offers the same shifting perspectives on the tactical pigs in *Animal Farm* that Orwell manages, David Pownall portrays the incremental merits of Mr Darcy as witnessed and experienced by Elizabeth Bennet in his version of *Pride and Prejudice*, the deliberate progression towards the closing horror of Stephen Mallatrat's *The Woman in Black* is deftly redolent of the build-up in Susan Hill's novel, Larry Lane's version of *Bartleby* for Red Shift ensures that all of the possibilities that Melville gives as to who or what Bartleby himself might be – simpleton, lunatic, lost soul, Satan – were all implied at various times in the actor's performance.

The company Improbable showed that one of the most imaginative ways of maintaining fidelity is to find a stage rhetoric with which to replace the literary rhetoric. In their dramatisation of Hoffmann's *Struwwelpeter* as a “junk opera” they found an equivalent antic mood for Hoffman's scary world, through the incipient introduction of an asylum doctor from Frankfurt to launch the tales and alarm the children. The constant underscoring, with haunting music sung in screeching falsetto by Martin Jacques of The Tiger-Lillies, created an unusually disturbing background, and the production's huge, slanting, sets, with extravagant movement and use of weird puppets (inspired by the original drawings by Hasso Bohme) achieved an energy that was as darkly humorous as the prose.

Edmundson's *The Mill on the Floss* (developed in close collaboration with Shared Experience and its directors, Nancy Meckler and Polly Teale), uses little of Eliot's words but shows a profound understanding of the mood of the novel and the issues it engenders. Her intrepid idea of employing three actresses to play Maggie Tulliver at different moments in the story, not only clarifies the changes in personality that Maggie experiences – and the dilemmas which rage inside her as the story develops – but intriguingly reflect an analogous inner conflict that Eliot herself suffered throughout her life. Kathryn Hughes, in her biography of the author, published four years after the adaptation was
Playing the Novel

first performed, offers interesting biographical support for Edmundson’s approach. The novelist went through equally potent transformations during her childhood and adolescence, and even changed her name three times (from Mary Ann Evans to Marion Evans to George Eliot).

By framing the adaptation around the ducking (and drowning) of a witch – referred to in chapter three of the novel, as Maggie reads a passage from Daniel Defoe’s *The History of the Devil* – Edmundson offers a more integrated arrangement of the aquatic themes in the novel. Some critics went so far as to suggest that she had “improved” on the novel, by reconciling the apparently arbitrary nature of the novel’s resolution: the sudden détente of the estranged Maggie and Tom Tulliver as they drown in each others’ arms.

Liz Lochhead overhauled Bram Stoker’s language in her adaptation of *Dracula*, to offer a more lyrical text that profoundly contributes to the psychological complexity of the characters. This is particularly effective for the disturbed patient, Renfield, whose speech bears little resemblance to the original dialogue, but as a contemporaneous impression of a troubled, telepathic mind, is faithful and dramatic:

> I once knew a woman who swallowed a fly. Perhaps she'll die. Perhaps she won't die. To die or not to die, that is the question. BED-LAM BEDLAM BEDLAM, bats in the belfry, bats, sets of screw-looses... screw Lucy, screw Lucy’s... Doctor Seward! Sewer. Lord Muck-mind. Mr Pissriver, Shit floats. Doctor Seward, you bastard! (Lochhead 75)

Lochhead adds a lightness of locution and a series of jokes to Stoker’s more sombre prose, offering important light relief from the demanding implications of the central theme.

In her more recent adaptation of the same novel, Bryony Lavery placed the story in contemporary Britain, using an extremely high-tech set, on a giant wooden crucifix, surrounded by plasma screens and computers. The action was full of characters e-mailing and texting each other, with jokey references to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and Dracula on the Atkins Diet. The younger audience at whom it was predominantly aimed, relished the production and the (basis of) Stoker’s story was told with surprising integrity.

A more recent example of tonal ingenuity was seen in Katie Mitchell’s play based on Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves* (retitled *Waves*).
Woolf herself described *The Waves* as “dramatic soliloquies – the study of a group of friends from childhood to death” or as “writing one’s mind” (in Bell 285). Mitchell’s unpredictable dramatic answer to these challenges was to present an extended prose-poem, made up of a group of interior monologues. There is no dialogue in the novel and the reader is never quite sure who is speaking. Mitchell used eight actors to play all the parts. The production showed a group of performers manning a sound and television studio. During the course of the play they took it in turns to film each other, using hand-held cameras for eerily concentrated close-ups. One group would set up the scene (which might be just a branch with some leaves on it, but which in shot would look like an entire wood), another would film it, others read from a copy of the novel and the remainder create subtle sound effects. It made for an unusual, yet beguiling, evening of theatre, with Woolf’s separation of the outer person from the inner voice skilfully realised.

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[In the original workshop, the following section demonstrated many of the issues raised through performed readings (by students from the University of Siegen) of *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, *Emma* and *The Great Gatsby*. For this chapter only the last of these adaptations is discussed.]

While both Austen and Hardy showed more than a common enthusiasm for theatre, Scott Fitzgerald was a passionate devotee. From the age of fifteen, when he wrote the *St Paul Plays* for his school (in St Paul), he was determined to become an important dramatist and his chief ambition throughout the 1920s was to establish himself as a Broadway playwright. His first professionally produced play however, was also his last. *The Vegetable* opened in New York in 1923 and received such a critical mauling (Fitzgerald himself described the first night as “a colossal frost”, Mizener 93) that he never returned to stage writing, although he was under contract as a Hollywood screenwriter for the last ten years of his life.

Subtitled “From Postman to President,” *The Vegetable* focuses on Jerry Frost, an obtuse clerk who transiently realises his fantasy of becoming President of the United States, before resuming a more
mundane life as a postman. The play was conceived not only as a spoof on the scandal-ridden Harding administration, but also as a satire on the “American Dream,” the theme that was shortly to find a more auspicious treatment in *Gatsby*. Indeed Charles Scribner III, descendant of the first publisher, maintains that the particular demands imposed by a play (precise construction, the confines of time and place, act and scene division) had a significant effect on the writing of *Gatsby*, the laconic novel Fitzgerald composed during the rehearsals for *The Vegetable*, as he commuted between New York and his home in Great Neck, Long Island.4

In his letters, Fitzgerald frequently refers to *Gatsby* as a “dramatic” novel and of all my adaptations it is the one that (theoretically) lends itself most obviously to a theatrical treatment. In the introduction written for the 1934 edition,5 Fitzgerald acknowledges the influence of Conrad’s preface to the unfortunately-titled *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, with its exhortation to evoke the tangibility of the scene described, through reference to the senses (“to the plasticity of sculpture, to the colour of painting, and to the magic suggestiveness of music,” Conrad xli). The settings are carefully and evocatively described and there are numerous, intimated stage directions in the prose: “he stretched out his arms towards the dark water in a curious way”; (Fitzgerald, *Gatsby* 25) “his hand up in a formal gesture of farewell”; (ibid. 56) “she laughed again, as if she had said something very witty” (ibid. 14). Like Hardy, Fitzgerald failed as a dramatist per se, but his sense of drama in his fiction is as equally sophisticated.

The novel determines its own dramatic method more unequivocally than is the case with the two other adaptations to which I have referred. Since its essence is in the first-person narrative perspective of Nick Carraway, it would seem futile to approach the play in any other way. The problem for the adapter is how to treat his protracted narrative with any sense of dramatic effectiveness. In early drafts of the novel the

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5 New York: Random House.
narration was third person and omniscient. With the calculated switch to the first person, Fitzgerald is careful to ensure that almost nothing is revealed that Nick himself has not been party to. The irony is further increased (and the adaptive process distended) in that Nick Carraway is in fact a particularly equivocal narrator figure. While he evidently regards his account as apathetic and impartial, there appear to be many elements that he misinterprets. His narrative is eloquent and his own dialogue witty, but from the first page the reader is prompted to note his innate snobbery and lack of humility. He misinterprets his father’s patent admonition of tolerance in the opening sentence and, while informing the reader that he is “inclined to reserve all judgements about people,” in the very same sentence he refers to “veteran bores” (Fitzgerald, *Gatsby* 7).

On the whole the adaptation plays down the potential for irony in the text (while allowing for its expression in performance) in favour of an elliptical narrative perspective. The subtitle of the play is “an American Dream” and the method is a kind of phantasmagoric mixture of sounds, music and dance, with scenes and narrative synthesising seamlessly into one another. “I have been drunk just twice in my life, and the second time was that afternoon,” Nick states about the day spent with Tom Buchanan and Myrtle Wilson, “so everything that happened has a dim, hazy cast over it…” (Fitzgerald, *Gatsby* 32). In some ways this is how I have treated the whole narrative, so that it turns into what Tom Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie* refers to as “a memory play” (Williams 235). This means that there are no fixed stage areas, the settings materialise and dematerialise as Nick mentions them and he is able to walk in and out of the action, both caught up in it and commentator upon it.

The elliptical nature of the dramatic narrative (scenes seeming to evaporate rather than end) is also intended to convey the unusual

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6 *The Great Gatsby* survives in three draft forms: they are known as “the manuscript” (Princeton University Library) “the unmarked first galleys proofs” (the Bruccoli Collection at the University of North Carolina) and the “rewritten galleys” (Princeton University Library). The latter two are published as *The Revised and Rewritten Galleys* (introduced and arranged by Matthew Bruccoli), New York: Garland Publishing, 1990.
characterisation in the novel. With each succeeding draft Fitzgerald made the characters more enigmatic and less intelligible. Gatsby is never even physically depicted. In a letter to his friend, John Peale Bishop, Fitzgerald wrote: “You are right about Gatsby being blurred and patchy. I never at any one time saw him clear [sic] myself – for he started as one man I knew and then changed into myself” (Turnball 378). His clothes are referred to (garish pink suits and gold ties), there is one solitary character summation (“I was looking at an elegant young rough-neck, a year or two over thirty, whose formality of speech just missed being absurd,” Fitzgerald, Gatsby 49) but nearly all of the background details to his personality were removed from earlier drafts and transferred to the short stories, “Winter Dreams” and “Absolution.”

The “American Dream” motif in the dramatic method also relates to a central, and highly ironic, theme of the novel. In later trying to define the jazz age, Fitzgerald wrote that: “It was an age of miracles, it was an age of excesses... something had to be done with all the nervous energy stored up and unexplained in the War” (Fitzgerald, “Echoes of the Jazz Age” 10). In other words, most of the characters in The Great Gatsby, from the protagonist to the partygoers, are in fact living in a kind of hysterical nightmare. Fitzgerald’s favoured title had always been Trimalchio in West Egg, with its palpable allusion to Petronius’s tawdry party-giver and his frivolous guests. But while the 1920s saw lavish lifestyles, reflected in the music from which the jazz age took its name, it also saw the emergence of the bootleggers, the speakeasies, the multimillionaire ‘booze barons’ and the consequent rise in gang murders and assassinations, all of which are cited, with varying obliquity, in The Great Gatsby.

Although these nefarious undertones remain as ambiguous in the play as they are in the novel, there are perhaps darker intimations of criminality, with silent figures continually seen rendering dubious transactions around Gatsby and slightly elaborated telephone conversations. “Nothing could be more sordid than the theme of The Great Gatsby,” writes Anthony Burgess, “yet the récit can delude some readers into believing that they are in the world of Keats’s ‘The Eve of Saint Agnes’” (vii). The récit of the play, although maintaining the exterior gaiety, tries to move towards the world (or at any rate the latency) of
Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, on which the Valley of the Ashes is obviously based.

The satire of the “Dream” is also seen in the central theme of class division, the Carraways and Buchanans representing one social group, the Wilsons and Gatsbys another. (The sole episode that is left out of the play, for obvious practical reasons, is that in chapter six where the snobbish Sloane party on horseback deliberately snub Gatsby.) Although not hailing from quite the same impoverished background as Gatsby, indigence was evidently a bitter concern of Fitzgerald himself: “That was always my experience,” he told his biographer, “a poor boy in a rich man’s club at Princeton” (Cross 51). The American Declaration of Independence, expounding liberty and equality, is evidently based on a false premise, the novel seems to be saying (Fitzgerald ultimately wanted to call it *Under the Red, White and Blue* but the novel had gone to press), and I reintroduced the reference to America itself, that Fitzgerald removed from the final page of the manuscript draft:

And as I sat there brooding on the old unknown world I too held my breath and waited, until I could feel the motion of America as it turned through the hours – my own blue lawn and the tall incandescent city on the water and beyond that, the dark fields of the republic rolling on under the night. (Eble 36)

In the published version, Fitzgerald makes the failure of the American Dream relate more specifically to Gatsby himself.

The Dream is also reflected, of course, in the music used in the adaptation. The jazz age evidently has to be audibly represented and the music is used in two distinct ways: the first entails the use of numbers from the big band leaders of the time – Paul Whiteman, Bix Beiderbecke, Jelly Roll Morton, etc. These form the background to the action at the Gatsby parties, suggesting an offstage orchestra, and with heavily choreographed dance numbers. Additionally, throughout Nick’s chimerical narrative, there are images of mad, drunken partygoers somewhere in the scenic background with accompanying melodic effects and sometimes disembodied big-band sounds to which dancers enter and exit the stage and which often delineate scene separation.

Fitzgerald goes out of his way to point out that the music at Gatsby’s parties is played not by a band, but by an ‘orchestra,’ making any possibility of live musicians in the production financially impractical.
and the use of pre-recorded music inevitable. Six songs are specified in
the novel and they are all used in the adaptation, though not necessarily
at the proportionate moments in the story.

The second use of music is a specially written (by the composer,
John White) recurring theme for a live solo saxophonist. This performer
specifically doubles as Michaelis, the Greek neighbour of George
Wilson, although his identity is not made manifest (or relevant) until
later in the play. Sometimes in view, sometimes an offstage presence, the
saxophonist’s melody is intended to suggest a jovial yet malevolent
through-line, redolent of the conflicting moods of the story. He acts as
a kind of unspoken chorus, aware of the story’s outcome but revealing
nothing until his knowing glance as he plays his instrument while
walking around the strewn corpses of Gatsby and George Wilson
towards the end. Although his melodies are inspired by the original
period, they also hint at something more ubiquitous.

A number of short sections in the play had to be devised, to extend
the length of scenes, or to add dialogue to what is merely recounted: the
moment where Nick serves tea to Gatsby and Daisy, for instance, which
needs to reflect their relative befuddlements after a five-year separation.
Fitzgerald’s dialogue is no less problematic to attempt to emulate than
Austen’s or Hardy’s. His style features an unusual number of adjectives
(“a second glass of wine” is mutated to “a second glass of corky but
rather superior claret” from the manuscript to the published text) and
his demanding use of verbs7 is a mark of Nick’s narrative. Where
possible I used sections from the eliminated passages that ended up in
Absolution or Winter Dreams, even if it was just an extra phrase or
rejoinder, or looked for deleted sections from the drafts. In switching
the characters of the famous film director and his starlet from the first
party scene to the second, for example (so that they could be witnessed,
with some distaste, by Daisy), Fitzgerald omitted some useful dialogue,
which I needed to expand some of the conversations in the second
scene:

7 “All fine prose is based on the verbs carrying the sentences. They make the
sentences move,” he advised his daughter, Scottie in a letter of Spring 1938 (Turnball
44).
“The man with her is her director,” Jordan continued, “He’s just been married.”
“To her?”
“No.”
She laughed. The director was bending over his pupil, so eagerly, that his chin and her metallic black hair were almost in juxtaposition.
“I hope he doesn’t slip,” she added, “And spoil her hair.”

A number of passages relating to Gatsby’s history, which recur throughout the novel ("he told me all this very much later," “it was this night that he told me the strange story of his youth”) have been moved to different points in the dramatic narrative and on two occasions, switched from Nick’s third-person account, to Gatsby’s own, first-person recitative. What Nick refers to as the “appalling sentimentality” of Gatsby’s wooing of Daisy, does indeed seem overwrought in his retelling of it:

His heart beat faster as Daisy’s white face came up to his own. He knew that when he kissed this girl, and forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his mind would never romp again like the mind of God. So he waited, listening for a moment longer to the tuning fork that had been struck upon a star. Then he kissed her. At his lips touch she blossomed for him like a flower and the incarnation was complete. (Fitzgerald, Gatsby 107)

From Gatsby’s own mouth, in earlier drafts, this is conveyed more realistically, perhaps partly because it appears to veer towards unlikely omniscience in Nick’s narration. I revert back to the first person in the play, making strategic omissions:

I knew that when I kissed this girl, my mind would never romp again like the mind of God. I waited, listening a moment longer to the tuning fork that had been struck upon a star. Then I kissed her. And as our lips touched, she blossomed like a flower and the transformation was complete. (Fry 48)

The “sentimentality” works more auspiciously through the first-person perspective than through Nick’s cynical reportage.

Throughout the play, the visual images referred to in the novel are intended to coalesce with the aural ones. The images of New York which appear when Nick first mentions his daily commute, are taken from the description on page sixty-six of the novel, the city as viewed when entering from Long Island – as Nick would have done: “The city seen from the Queensborough bridge is always the city seen for the first time, in its wild promise of all the mystery and beauty in the world.”
The other central, almost constant, image in the play are the enormous eyes of “Dr T.J. Eckleberg” outside George Wilson’s garage, which Wilson eventually, in his paranoia, sees as God. These eyes only evolved once Fitzgerald had seen the proposed jacket cover by Francis Cugat, which is still used for many contemporary editions. The image is of huge eyes, with a single green tear, overlooking a bright, colourful Manhattan. “For Christ’s [sic] sake don’t give anyone that jacket you’re saving for me,” Fitzgerald wrote to his editor, Max Perkins, “I’ve written it into the book” (Kuel and Bryer 76).

The visual and aural images come together in the final moments of the play, as Nick listens to various refrains, while standing outside Gatsby’s house, “brilliantly illuminated” as it is on the day he learns of Gatsby’s love for Daisy.

Mêlée of voices – Gatsby’s, Daisy’s, Tom’s, Jordan’s, Wolfshiem’s, party guests’ repeated and refrained; distant dance numbers, extracts from the saxophone theme... They suddenly cut dead. (Fry 81)

These help to create the “lingering after-effects” Fitzgerald suggested he wanted in a letter to Ernest Hemingway (Turnbull 329).

Anthony Burgess describes The Great Gatsby as “relentlessly literary” while acknowledging that its visual symbols “cry out for the camera” (Burgess viii). There have been a number of attempts to gainsay this relentlessness, including four films, two operas, a ballet and a stage adaptation that premiered two years after the publication of the novel. The latter was a dramatisation by Owen Davis, a popular writer of melodramas, which successfully played a four-month season in New York in 1925. Fitzgerald, who was living in Europe, never saw the adaptation, but was doubtless gratified by the $7,000 it made him. The adaptation lacks any semblance of Fitzgerald’s wit and subtlety of character, in favour of intrigue and sensation. As Fitzgerald’s friend, the writer Ring Lardner wrote: “Every now and then one of Scott’s lines would pop out and hit you in the face and make you wish he had done the dramatisation himself” (Bruccoli and Duggan 189).

My intention, in each of the three adaptations discussed, has been to make them appear as though they could have been written by the novelists themselves (which, as far as the rhetoric is concerned, they mostly were). It would be cheering to imagine that these three theatre
enthusiasts might have extolled the theatricality as much as the veracity and that perhaps even Thomas Hardy, pace Billington, might have come round from his ultimate, hard-bitten theory that “to dramatize a novel was a mistake in art.”

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Primary Literature


Secondary Literature

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The focus here is on a specific theatrical genre, the musical, as the contemporary vehicle for religious drama on the English-speaking (or singing) stage – and as the major theatrical form today in which adaptation is the primary defining quality. Surprisingly perhaps, theorists of adaptation generally ignore musical theatre altogether. Julie Sanders has passing reference only to *Kiss Me Kate* and *West Side Story*, musicals which are also mentioned by Linda Hutcheon – Shakespeare being the real focus for both, rather than the musicals themselves – although Hutcheon in dealing with the interconnections between film and stage, also refers to the “obviously economically driven” Broadway musical versions of movies, such as *The Lion King*, and discusses the way the naturalistic emphasis of film causes the movie version of *Cabaret* to reduce the music to just two pieces, with the rest of the music being “played, naturalistically on a gramophone, on the street by an accordionist, or in a room by a piano player” (Hutcheon 5, 47). Neither Hutcheon nor Sanders consider that the modern musical is almost entirely composed of adaptations, nor even mentions the degree to which the Bible is a major source for adaptation (which is of course widespread across genres, even if it has become a particular focus for the musical).
Drama of course has always been derivative: Shakespeare borrowed repeatedly from earlier playwrights, copied speeches from North’s Plutarch, dramatized historians like Holinshed – while Bertolt Brecht, who borrowed from Shakespeare and Marlowe, as well as Restoration dramatists like Farquhar and John Gay, famously declared that the strength of a literary tradition depends on its plagiarism. (see Fuegi, 59). And we should remember that it was only since the early nineteenth century that originality became privileged. Indeed it was the Romantics who changed the term “original” from its traditional meaning – going back all the way to origins – to its opposite: “new and never before expressed”. And, as Michael Fry suggests in his paper here, adaptations can be cutting edge in stylistic experiment, precisely because the material is already known, which is possibly one reason why creative directors with their own theatre companies – like Elizabeth LeCompte and the Wooster Group, or Simon McBurney with Theatre de Complicite – tend to specialize in adapting material. Authors, of course, like Jo Clifford, set up a hierarchy of originality, even when their work consists mainly of adaptations – as indeed Clifford’s has done. One might even suggest that the current Scottish drama is largely defined by adaptation, with not only Clifford but also Liz Lochhead, who has adapted everything from popular novels like Dracula (1989) to classical drama like Medea (2000), with the Greek myth being given a Scottish slant, or Molière – from Tartuffe in 1985 to her most recent play: Educating Agnes, which is an update of Molière’s School for Wives seen through the prism of the 1980 award-winning comedy of Educating Rita.

As Sanders points out, the processes of adaptation and appropriation are almost always political acts; and simply the act of borrowing is a response to the original, automatically writing back “from a new or revised political and cultural position” (98). And many adaptations, of course, copy to ridicule or reject, rather than signaling any sense of homage to a literary tradition. One need only think of Sarah Kane’s grotesque updating of Seneca’s Phaedra (1996), or several modern adaptations of Shakespeare, from Edward Bond’s Lear in 1971, Howard Barker’s 1989 Seven Lears, or Howard Brenton’s 1981 Thirteenth Night and Roy Williams’s 2007 Days of Significance (which play respectively off Twelfth Night and As You Like It) or even Tom Stoppard’s 1966
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Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead. All are in challenging opposition to Shakespeare, and highly critical of the plays on which they are based.

It is generally assumed that adaptations require a sophisticated, or at least educated audience, since a piece such as Kane’s Phaedra loses some of its point for spectators who have not come across the source text (and in England today Seneca is hardly read outside Renaissance studies). However, when the material adapted is part of the general culture, then its familiarity, even on the most superficial level, can be reassuring and add a sense of intellectual depth for the wider public. So it is perhaps not surprising, when we look at popular culture on the stage – and in particular the most obviously popular theatrical genre of all, occupying (as it notoriously does) so much of the West End, and even more of Broadway: the musical – that we find these crowd-pullers are almost entirely based on adaptation. Indeed the British musical and many American musicals after the mid 1950s are, almost without exception, based on other works – novels, plays, films, or even visual material, as well as on the Bible. Indeed one can tell what the popular (as distinct from the academic) canon actually is, by looking at the material appropriated by the modern musical.

The nineteenth-century novel has been a perennial source, with Les Misérables and The Hunchback of Notre Dame from Victor Hugo (both of which have been adapted so often, for stage and film, as well as musical, that they are better known in adaptation than as the original novels), or Wilkie Collins’s early detective story of The Woman in White and Hans Christian Andersen’s The Little Mermaid. Other borrowings run from eighteenth century material, with Voltaire’s Candide to the twentieth century with Aspects of Love (originally a novella by David Garnett) or Cabaret (from Christopher Isherwood), even The Lord of the Rings. As many musicals have been based on plays: Sweeney Todd or Spring Awakening (1979 and 2006), as well as Follies and Merrily We Roll Along (1973 and 1981). Adaptations go back as far as Greek theatre with Sondheim’s 1974/2004 version of The Frogs – although the favorite is clearly Shakespeare: Something Funny Happened on the Way to the Forum and West Side Story (1962 and 1957) as well as less obvious borrowings, like the 1997 Lion King (from Hamlet) or Return to the Forbidden Planet (1989, from The Tempest). But it’s not just the most
obvious modern story telling genres that are adapted by the musical. There are musicals based on operas too, like the 1996 Rent – La Bohème in the age of AIDS – or Miss Saigon – a 1989 updating of Madame Butterfly. Taking other artistic genres into account, there’s also a well known musical riff on T.S. Eliot’s Possum’s Book of Practical Cats, and even one musical adapted from a picture: Sunday in the Park with George, 1984, which Sondheim bases not only on Seurat’s well-known picture of the “Grande Jatte” – but also in musical composition, on the pointilliste style of painting.

The most commercially exploitive form of musical adaptation is films, from Whistle Down the Wind or A Little Night Music to the Disney franchise of Mary Poppins and The Lion King, which are marketing tools. However, there is also one example that catches the cross-media meta-theatricality which is intrinsic to many types of adaptation. This is Lloyd Webber’s 1993 musical version of Sunset Boulevard – replaying the classic Billy Wilder Hollywood movie, with Gloria Swanson as actress Norma Desmond – where a film satirizing the fantasies of Hollywood movies is doubly framed: both by being put on stage, and through the songs; this effect will be multiplied when the film version of the musical Sunset Boulevard (originally scheduled for 2006) comes out. As a movie based on a musical derived from a movie about movies, it will parody the postmodern quality of citation or intertextuality.

Tarzan and Wicked provide two other examples, are iconic on more than one level: in terms of adaptation, and in the public consciousness. Wicked, 2003, is based on a novel, with the same title, which can be read as a feminist counter-story to The Wizard of Oz; and that film in turn was based on the original novel. And, in addition to this cross-media multiplication, the classic Judy Garland film has achieved cult status for the gay community. Tarzan is even more embedded in the popular consciousness through the multiplicity of adaptations. Edgar Rice Burrough’s story began life as a magazine serial before appearing as a novel, and was then turned into a comic strip in newspapers from 1929 all the way to 1972, with reprints continuing all the way to today. There have been at least ten play-station and computer games based on the Tarzan story; and the Internet Movie Database lists no fewer than 88 movies with Tarzan in the title between 1918 and 1999. Tarzan was also
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the hero of two popular radio programs in the US. The first aired from 1932 to 1936; the second from 1951 to 1953. As for TV, there were Tarzan series after series, starting with live action on NBC from 1966-1968, and an animated series (Tarzan the Lord of the Jungle) from 1976 to 1977, followed by the Tarzan Adventure Hour programs which teamed Tarzan up with Batman, the Lone Ranger, the Super Seven, and so on, from 1977 to 1982 and there have been several other more recent series, including one in the 1990s where Tarzan was portrayed as a blond environmentalist, with Jane turned into a French ecologist. Then of course there was Disney’s animated TV series The Legend of Tarzan (2001-2003) – a spin-off from its animated film, just as the recent musical has been; and the Disney musical was by no means either the first stage version, or even the first musical about Tarzan. As early as 1921 there was a Broadway production of Tarzan of The Apes starring Ronald Adair, while in 1976, a rock musical appeared, under the title of T. Zee.

This production outline demonstrates the degree to which the 2006 musical of Tarzan calls upon an extraordinarily wide cultural awareness, with significant historical depth. Embodying the tropes of ‘European Aristocrat versus Jungle Savagery,’ ‘Man at one with Animals,’ ‘Physicality versus Civilization’ (and so on), Tarzan is not just the epitome of boyhood fantasy but also an archetypal hero – as well of course as reflecting all sorts of postcolonial and gender issues. And one could see almost all successful musicals as drawing on the same sort of iconic figures or stories. It is perhaps because of this that they have become the quintessential popular live-entertainment form. And (despite the film being made of Sunset Boulevard) musicals, as such, are not just one in a series of adaptive forms: music becomes an intensifier, heightening the material emotionally, while the spectacular nature of the staging, which also characterizes the musical genre, reinforces the emotional impact. The musical tends to be the final variation: the form in which the adaptation gets fixed.

Canonicity is, as Sanders and others have pointed out, “almost a required feature […] for adaptation […] to be possible it requires prior knowledge of the text(s) being assimilated, absorbed, reworked, and refashioned by the adaptive process” (Sanders 120); and in terms of
Brigitte Bogar and Christopher Innes

popular consciousness, as a priest in the Maysles brothers’ documentary film, *Salesman*, declares: “the world’s best-seller is the Bible” (n. pag.). Of course, too, in Western society Christ is the ultimate iconic figure. So it is hardly surprising if the Bible has become one of the musical’s favorite sources for adaptation. Several popular musicals come immediately to mind – most notably, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolored Dreamcoat* and *Godspell* (all three written between 1968 and 1971, although religious themes continue to fill the musical stage from then right up to today). The most radical example, which to a large extent set the tone for this genre of musical, is *Godspell*, written in 1970, with music by Stephen Schwartz. The title is actually an archaic word for “Gospel;” and the musical is based on a series of parables from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. The text of act one is a seemingly random series of lessons and parables, all revolving round forming a community. Act two essentially follows the Passion story, with such familiar scenes as the interrogation of Jesus by the Pharisees, the Last Supper, Gethsemane. The original production of *Godspell* was performed by a cast of five men and five women – performing as ten clowns, where Jesus was the Chief Clown and had the driving action all the time.¹ The concept was derived by John-Michael Tebelak from a book by Harvey Cox, head of the Harvard Divinity School, entitled *Feast of Fools*, most particularly the chapter called “Christ the Harlequin.”

In the script, other than the figures of Jesus and of John the Baptist – who also doubles as Judas – the characters are called by the first names of the cast members, which of course changes from production to production, giving the show something of the continuous historical present of all traditional interpretations of the Bible. The first production was also set in a distinctly urban and gritty environment – a brick wall at the back and a high chain-linked fence that enclosed the action and suggested an abandoned inner-city playground, without disguising the theatrical reality of the almost bare stage itself. Three unfinished

¹ There are often misconceptions about the clown symbolism in *Godspell*. For instance, sometimes it is misunderstood as the cast being ‘hippies’ or ‘flower children.’

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wooden planks and two sawhorses provided the rest of the scenery. All of the props and costume add-ons used in the show came out of garbage bags on stage or were hanging at the top of the show on the fence that backed the stage. In lieu of area lighting, illumination was often provided by one or more of the nine PAR lights that were hung in three rows over the stage and which actors could turn on and off when they needed to be lit. In other words, there was an emphasis on simplicity, on ‘poor theatre,’ on theatrical magic created by the actors without ‘production values.’ And, following on this concept, the lighting, while colorful, was deliberately rudimentary.

The show starts off with the voice of God declaring, in a way that links the Bible with the ecological aspect of the ‘flower power’ generation:

My name is known: God and King ... I have made All of Nothing for Man's sustentation. And of this pleasant Garden, that I have mostly goodly planted, I will make him Gardener, for his own re-creation.2

This part is played by the character who then becomes Jesus – emphasizing theatrically the connection between God the Father and God the Son – however wearing a T-shirt with a big S, referring to Superman in a deliberately ironic confusion of categories. When the company enters, they pick up T-shirts to identify with various philosophers, such as Socrates, da Vinci and Martin Luther, as they act out the Tower of Babel. John the Baptist blows three notes on the Shofar to call to order; and only then does the real story start, framed by the song “Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord,” which is also repeated at the end of the second act after Jesus has been crucified. John baptizes Jesus, and Jesus explains in a song that he has come to “save the people,” after which he applies clown makeup to the faces of the company as a physical manifestation that they are now his disciples. This is during his first quotation from the Bible [Matthew 5.17-18]. Jesus leads them through the first act, guiding them so they eventually become a group, united by playing games and telling or acting out lessons through which each of them

2 Schwartz, n. pag. Further unmarked references are to the online text of Stephen Schwartz’s libretto for Godspell.
commit to Jesus. These lessons are embodied in very familiar parables: The Widow and the Judge, The Pharisee and the Tax Collector, The Master and the Servant owing debt; then the parable of the Sheep and the Goats, the Good Samaritan, and Abraham and Lazarus. Towards the end of the first act we get the parable of the Sower and the Seed, which is presented so as to create a mood of thanksgiving for the simple things. After an enactment of the Prodigal Son, a celebratory note is sounded, a trestle table is set up on stage, and the audience is invited up for a drink of wine (or grape juice) mingling with the actors during intermission.

In the second act, after an opening number that continues the scenes of playfulness and includes some good-natured teasing of Jesus by his followers, Jesus announces: “This is the beginning.” The community has been formed, and they are ready to move through the challenging sequence of events leading to the crucifixion. Jesus takes off everybody’s clown makeup, saying that they have absorbed his teaching into themselves and do not need the outer masking. Judas goes off to betray Jesus, while the rest sit down to eat the Last Supper (placed in the iconic position of the famous da Vinci painting). To the accompaniment of “On the Willows,” a pretty song adapted from Psalm 137, Jesus says goodbye to each of the disciples. They fall asleep and leave him alone. Jesus and Judas act out the crucifixion; and Jesus dies.

The parables are spiced up with contemporary words, but they are still basically the same; for example in scene 3 we have a passage from St. Luke with demotic phrasing and common language:

JOANNE: There once was a rich man whose land yielded heavy crops. He debated with himself: “Oh, what am I to do?” he said. “I have not the room to store my produce. Ahh, this is what I will do,” he said. “I will tear down my storehouses and build them bigger. And I will collect in them all my corn and popcorn and tuna surprise and M&Ms (ad lib a list here). And then I will say to myself: Man, you have plenty of good things laid by you, enough to last you for many years. Take life easy. Eat. Drink. Enjoy yourself.” But then God said to
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the man (*in loud echoey voice*) You fool! This very night you must surrender your life! You have made your money. Who will get it now?3

The sub-title of Godspell declares the entire musical is derived from the Gospel according to St. Matthew; and indeed almost all the story material used in Godspell is taken directly from the Bible – although in fact the parables are spread among the different Gospels, with four from Luke, as compared with three from Matthew. There is even more of a mixture in the songs, though almost all of these too are adapted, with three having lyrics based on verses from Matthew,4 and seven being episcopal hymns or psalms,5 while only four have modern lyrics.6 These sources are hardly re-written musically; and Godspell contains very little in the way of new lyrics. While the dialogue has been extensively modernized and the structuring of the material has been completely altered, together with the introduction of clown masks, there are so few modern tunes that the music itself reinforces the familiarity of the standard parables from which the action is composed. As a result, unlike

3 Schwartz, n. pag., from Luke 16-20. Bolded words emphasize the contemporary phrasing. The original Bible text reads: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. 17 He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' 18 Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.' 20 But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?"


5 “Save the People”: Episcopal Hymnal 1940, no. 496; “Day by Day”: E. Hymnal, no. 429; “Bless the Lord”: E. Hymnal, no. 293 (adaptation from Psalm 103); “All Good Gifts”: E. Hymnal no. 138; “Turn Back, O Man”: E. Hymnal no. 536 (to be sung, according to the script, A la Mae West; “We Beseech Thee”: E. Hymnal no. 229; “On the Willows”: Adaptation of Psalm 137.

other forms of adaptation – where there might be a range of familiarity with the material, with some of the audience not knowing it at all – here almost everything is already known, to some degree, by the audience. It is culture from below, not catering to an elite; and this popular familiarity in the choice of parables, and in different ways with both the music and the lyrics of the songs, like the clown cliché, goes along with an emphasis on democracy and the common man.

This is trumpeted in the electrifying song, “God Save the People,” from the opening; and in light of its ringing forcefulness, the rationale the original lyricist gave for writing Godspell is clear: Tebelak recalls going to a church for the Easter service – the high point of the Christian ritual – and finding the whole ceremony boring, with the congregation murmuring the refrains automatically, and a complete lack of any emotional commitment. As he said: “I left with the feeling that rather than rolling the rock away from the tomb, they were piling more on.”(Bradley 87) Going back home he sat straight down to write something that would arouse the passionate religious emotions that he had found so signally lacking in the Church. This can perhaps be seen in the odd doubling of John the Baptist with Judas: together with his disciples being the contemporary actors on the stage, the effect of overlapping the prophet and the traitor is to diminish the reality of the historical context – it underlines the singularity of Christ. Tebelak’s response to the Church also explains the structure of the action, with its focus on building a community, and the naming of the characters, which emphasizes that they are ordinary people of today, as well as underlining the authenticity of the actors’ experience: they literally are the people they are representing. And the opening song itself, calling as it does on political passions as well as on straight humanitarian feelings and on the Biblical context, illustrates the way the types of composition in musicals can transmit emotional fervor to the audience, turning the spectators at a theatrical performance into a quasi-religious congregation.

A far more direct adaptation of the actual Bible story is Jesus Christ Superstar (written by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice in 1970, although first released as a concept album a year before the first production, which – underlining the international nature of the musical form – took place in Budapest in Hungarian). The action is closely based on the
final seven days in the life of Jesus. However, in this two-act rock musical Jesus is depicted as a radically different figure from the standard Biblical picture, with very contemporary features. This new Jesus is a prophet and – giving him a central musical presence – a rock star whose appeal stems as much from the crowd’s energy as from his own inspirational message.

Jesus is portrayed as having human qualities, doubts, and faults – and because of this, his crucifixion becomes more affecting. The resurrection is left out – leaving us with the images of Jesus as a man on the cross – not necessarily the son of God. Similarly, Judas is also quite different from the Biblical figure, being depicted as a troubled person caught in a conflict between his love for Jesus and Jesus’ new claim for divinity. At the beginning, when Judas is upset when Jesus accepts the prostitute Maria Magdalena, and asks how “a man like you can waste his time on women of her kind”, which leads to an angry response from Jesus and gives the first ‘proper’ quotation from the Bible – although, as with all these musicals the language and images are contemporary common speech, and the text here is out of context, coming as it does from John 8.7 about the woman who committed adultery: “If your slate is clean - then you can throw stones / If your slate is not then leave her alone.” (John 8.7)

This is followed by the next Bible passage in the musical, where Judas complains about Maria’s use of expensive ointments:

Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, “Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year’s wages.” … “Leave her alone,” Jesus replied. “It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will

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7 As well as being based on the Bible, this may also be borrowing from Dennis Potter’s 1969 BBC TV play, Son of Man, which also gave a psychological portrait of Christ as an ordinary person.

8 The original Bible text reads: “When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her” (John 8.7).
always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.” (John 12.1-9)

The Lloyd Webber version is radically updated both in wording and in rhythms – and is given a contemporary political emphasis that makes Judas the socialist with a conscience, while in a striking reversal Jesus is represented as the typically self-centered rock star.

JUDAS: Woman your fine ointment-brand new and expensive
   Could have been saved for the poor
   Why has it been wasted? We could have raised maybe
   Three hundred silver pieces or more
   People who are hungry, people who are starving
   Matter more than your feet and hair

JESUS: Surely you’re not saying we have the resources
   To save the poor from their lot?
   There will be poor always, pathetically struggling –
   Look at the good things you’ve got!
   Think! while you still have me
   Move! while you still see me
   You’ll be lost and you’ll be so sorry when I’m gone… (Superstar n. pag.)

This is followed by the rock-star entry into Jerusalem, and the singing of Hosanna. The musical is a baroque fusion of styles, rock rhythm with ballad narrative, dramatic characterization with rollicking choreography, and operatic star performances. Sacred themes are fused with ancient political history and modern sensibilities creating the first real rock musical to deal with biblical themes. And the extreme novelty in music and characterization is clearly made possible by the closeness of the narrative to the Biblical original. As opposed to Godspell, in keeping closely to the known structure from the Bible, Tim Rice and Lloyd Webber are able to update not only the text, but radically change the Biblical figures, and use the counter-culture ambience of rock music.

This equation of the familiar with the new, together with its implications, is most clearly seen in an earlier Biblical musical by Lloyd Webber,
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*Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat.* It was first performed as a 15-minute pop cantata, then expanded to 35 minutes and finally in 1972 performed in the 2-hour version we know today. *Joseph* is completely sung and without any spoken dialog. As with *Jesus Christ Superstar* the story of *Joseph* follows the story from the Bible quite closely (Genesis 37.39-46) – practically the only difference being that in the musical version Benjamin goes to Egypt together with the other brothers, and that Joseph spends only a short time in jail instead of two years – but this familiar story has been translated into even more highly contemporary language and characters than in *Jesus Christ Superstar*. So, for instance, Pharaoh is presented as an Elvis figure, both in hairstyle and singing. The story is framed by a narrator and a children’s chorus, and it uses a mixture of musical styles such as French ballads (“Those Canaan Days”), Elvis inspired rock and roll (“Song of the King”) country and western (“One More Angel in Heaven”), the 1920s Charleston (“Potirphar”), Caribbean Dance (“Benjamin Calypso”) and disco (“Go, Go, Go Joseph”). In other words the music, where well-known popular styles are suited to the characterization or the situation, is as much designed for its immediate recognition factor as the biblical story itself.

After *Superstar* Lloyd Webber leaves the direct adaptation of the Bible, but his later musicals are full of Christ figures, people who sacrifice themselves to save others – as in the 1996 *Whistle down the Wind* – sometimes he even uses an anti-Christ protagonist, as in *Phantom of the Opera*, 1986. Lloyd Webber is generally associated with initiating the vogue for Biblical musicals, and is perhaps the most well known exponent of this form of adaptation. However, even before Lloyd Webber’s first musical, there was at least one musical based on a Bible story. This was a show called *The Apple Tree* which opened on Broadway in 1966. It is a series of three plays loosely bound together. The first play deals with

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9 *Joseph* was Lloyd Webber’s second musical, the first one being the forgotten, but eventually produced *The Likes of Us* in 2005. Clearly it was turning to Biblical themes that promoted his career.

10 For example, *Cats*, *Evita*, *Starlight Express*, *The Beautiful Game*, *The Woman in White* all have religious elements.
the story of the Creation – based on the Mark Twain novel *The Diary of Adam and Eve*. And later in his career when Stephen Schwartz returned to the Bible in his 1986 musical, *Children of Eden*, it was basically an adaptation of two other adaptations that were themselves based on adaptations – a mixture of the story of *The Apple Tree* and the 1970 *Two by Two* by Richard Rogers: a musical about Noah and the Great Flood. So *Children of Eden* had a complicated and self-reflexive genealogy, being based on two other musicals: one based on a play, *The Flowering Peach*, 1973, by Clifford Odets, and the other derived partly from Mark Twain, and all five works in turn adapted from the Bible. As complex as the derivations of *Sunset Boulevard*, this also indicates the popularity of these religious musicals – another sign of which is the fact that even Disney has dramatized Biblical themes on the musical stage, with an adaptation from the Books of Samuel and 1 Chronicles, in a 1997 musical called *King David*.

Musical theatre, then, can indeed be seen as the major form of contemporary religious drama. As Ian Bradley remarked in his book *You’ve Got To Have A Dream*, “musicals are the vehicle through which a significant number of people now gain much of their philosophy of life and their spiritual and theological perspectives” (135). And he goes on to point out that “[i]t is increasingly to songs from shows and films rather than to hymns that people are turning to express and represent their feelings at significant rites of passage such as weddings and funerals” (ibid.).

It was T. S. Eliot who first tried to reintroduce religious drama into what he saw as a godless and spiritually corrupt twentieth century, with *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935); and he influenced a whole range of poetic and religious dramatists from the 1930s through the 1950s: among them W.H. Auden, Ronald Grant, and Christopher Fry. Yet their drama – esoteric and in Fry’s case, whimsical – sank into obscurity under the rhetoric of Osborne and the materialism of the ‘kitchen-sink’ drama. Since then the theme of religion has been almost completely absent from the mainstream English or American stages, and where there have been religious references, as in David Hare’s *Racing Denon* (1993) where the Church of England is anatomized, these have been subsumed in politics. By contrast, *Joseph, Jesus Christ Superstar, Godspell*
Adaptations from the Bible

and *Children of Eden* are not only all directly based on the Bible, while almost all the rest of Lloyd Webber’s output is clearly religious in the sacrifice of the main characters. These musicals are specifically designed to create emotion focused on religious experience; and that is one definition of religious drama. It is also not coincidental that the creators of religious musicals have also written music for the church. Bernstein wrote a Mass together with Stephen Schwartz, Andrew Lloyd Webber composed a Requiem – and the connection with popular music and religion is underlined by Paul McCartney also writing a Requiem.

Works Cited

*Primary Literature*


*Secondary Literature*


In a lecture at University College Dublin for the First James Joyce Research Colloquium, Hans Walter Gabler pointed out that a text can always be “otherwise.” In other words, any given text is not a stable entity. It has a life of its own. It is the result of authorial choices and revisions, and different readers are likely to provide different interpretations of its meaning. Adaptations point precisely to the unstable nature of the adapted text since they extend its diachronic life by means of selection, and explore and actualise some of its thematic and stylistic possibilities. Thus, they build bridges which connect the adapted text not only to the adaptive text, but also to the literary output of the adapter. Bolger’s adaptation of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* is no exception. If I may steal a metaphor from Joyce’s first short story in *Dubliners*, “The Sisters,” *A Dublin Bloom* is and functions as a gnomon. It produces

1 The colloquium took place from the 16th to the 20th of April 2008.
2 Throughout *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon uses the terms “adapted text” and “adaptive text” to refer respectively to the “source” text and to the “adaptation” proper. Thus, she goes beyond the traditional dichotomy – fidelity to the original versus betrayal of the original – and allows Adaptation Studies to focus on “an adaptation as an adaptation” (6), as “a work that is second without being secondary” (9).
3 “Gnomon” comes from the Greek verb “gign skein” which means “to know” or “to come to know.”
meaning in the form of a critical reading of the adapted text through the incremental breaking of its structure.

_A Dublin Bloom_ was commissioned by and received its world premiere from the Rosenbach Museum and Library in celebration of the 90th Bloomsday on Thursday 16 June 1994 at the Zellerbach Theatre in Pennsylvania. It was restaged just once in June 2004 in Chicago at the Victory Gardens Theatre to mark the centenary of Bloomsday. Bolger’s main aim was didactic. In his “Playwright’s Note,” he clearly states that he wished “to unravel the story of Mr Bloom’s day in a manner that may lead at least some people back to the actual reading and enjoyment of the superb novel itself” (3). Here Bolger, like most (if not all) adapters of Joyce’s works, treats the adapted text with extreme deference and humility and says that “[i]n addition to being the greatest novel ever published, _Ulysses_ is also among the most intricate and complex […] I am no Joyce expert whatsoever, and my response to the book has always been on a very human level” (3).

In order to unravel the story, Bolger’s main literary device is to remind the readers of the Homeric parallel to the structure of _Ulysses_ by means of reviving and superimposing on the text the headings which Joyce had decided to suppress. Bolger goes even a step further by explicitly adding time and place setting to each scene so that the linearity of the plot is foregrounded. Some reviewers of the 2004 staging point precisely to this structural and didactic choice when they say that “Dermot Bolger’s stage adaptation offers a rudimentary path through the verbal thicket of _Ulysses_” (Barnidge), or that “[a]lthough _Ulysses_ has a reputation of being a difficult book, the writing is often extremely realistic and detailed. From scene to scene the play is easy to understand. It’s connecting the individual components that may cause problems for the audience” (Zeff). For clarity’s sake, here are some samples of this device from the adaptation:

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4 The director was Greg Doran, from the Royal Shakespeare Company in London, who had just staged an acclaimed version of _The Odyssey_ by Derek Walcott.

5 The performance was devised by The Irish Repertory of Chicago, and directed by Matt O’Brien.
Dermot Bolger’s A Dublin Bloom

ACT ONE, Scene One. Telemachus. The Tower, Sandycove, 8 a.m. 16th June 1904 (11)
ACT ONE, Scene Two. Calypso. Mr Bloom’s house, Eccles street, 8 a.m. (13)
ACT ONE, Scene Five. Penelope. Molly’s bed, 2 a.m. (Morning of the 17th) (18)

Although this choice may seem to flatten the novel’s rich texture excessively, and although Bolger may be going against Joyce’s authorial intentions, I would argue that the adapter’s decision points directly to the intertextuality of Joyce’s text in at least two ways. Firstly, because the readers know immediately that they should be alert to Homeric resonances. Secondly, because the time/place references and the chapters’ headings can be found in two schemata that Joyce himself compiled as a way to help his readers make sense of *Ulysses*. The so-called Linati and the Gilbert schemata are an integral part of Joyce’s output and they are reader friendly as much as our postmodern *CliffNotes*.

The adaptation consists of two acts. The first one has eighteen scenes, and the second seven. It includes a selection of material from all the chapters of *Ulysses* except for “Scylla and Charybdis.” The absence of “Scylla and Charybdis” may be due to two intertwined reasons. Although the technique of the episode is “dialectic” (Attridge 268), its “mock-Socratic dialogue” (Kellog 147) would break the flow of the action on the stage. In other words, Bolger may have felt that Stephen’s argument that “Shakespeare identified himself with the ghost of Hamlet’s father rather than with Hamlet” (151) was too lengthy to be staged. In addition, the insertion of excerpts from “Scylla and Charybdis” would have taken the focus away from both Leopold and Molly, whose presence is pre-eminent in Bolger’s adaptation.7

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6 Ellmann informs us that “[e]arly in November [1921] Joyce lent Larbaud, as the previous year he had lent Linati, an intricate scheme for *Ulysses* which showed its Odyssian parallels and its special techniques” (519). This schema “began to circulate a little in typescript under the most solemn injunctions of secrecy until 1931, when Stuart Gilbert published most of it in his book, *James Joyce’s Ulysses*” (521).

7 In a conversation with Frank Budgen regarding *Ulysses*, Joyce himself stated that “Stephen no longer interests me to the same extent. He has a shape that can’t be changed” (263).
The play opens with a “Prologue” set on 17 June 1904 at 2 a.m. The very first stage direction tells us that “[t]he stage is divided into three areas by a raised platform at the centre back which has steps leading up” (9). Molly’s bed is on the platform but a makeshift rake can “be raised in blackout to block her from view” (9) when she isn’t speaking. Bloom enters and “eases up Molly’s nightclothes to kiss both her buttocks” (9) then “[t]he stage goes to blackout filled by swelling music and voices” (9). As table 1 below shows, these voices quote lines from different sections of *Ulysses*, as an orchestra tunes up for the overture of a concert.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A Dublin Bloom</th>
<th>Ulysses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>THE CITIZEN: By Jesus, I’ll crucify that bloody jewman, so I will</td>
<td>from “Cyclops”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARTHA: Are you not happy in your own home you poor naughty boy?</td>
<td>from “Lotuseaters”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REST OF CAST: Trembling calves. Butcher’s buckets. Rawhead and bloody bones</td>
<td>from “Laestrygonians”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LENEHAN: What’s your hurry, Boylan? Got the horn or what?</td>
<td>from “Sirens”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACTRESS A: <em>(Reciting)</em> Her mouth glued on his in a voluptuous kiss…</td>
<td>from “Wandering Rocks”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUB NARRATOR: And Bloom’s old fellow before him, the robbing bagman that poisoned himself…</td>
<td>from “Cyclops”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAINES: A dark horse himself, the same Bloom.</td>
<td>from “Cyclops”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REST OF CAST: <em>(Sleepy chant)</em> With Sinbad the Sailor and Tinbad the Tailor and Jinbad the Jailor […]</td>
<td>from “Ithaca”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOLLY: Yes because he never did a thing like that before […] why can’t you kiss a man without going and marrying him first…</td>
<td>from “Penelope”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1: Opening lines from the “Prologue” in ACT ONE and the corresponding episodes in *Ulysses*

Here Bolger provides the first and most important structural break of the adapted text: he foregrounds some chapters, themes and stylistic features of *Ulysses*. Therefore, I will deal mainly with some of those parts of the novel he pre-selected for his adaptation: “Telemachus,” “Lotuseaters,” “Laestrygonians,” “Sirens,” “Cyclops,” and “Penelope.” I’d like to focus on “Sirens” before approaching the “Prologue” in more detail. As Joyce informs us via his schemata, the technique of ‘Sirens’ is that of a fuga per canonem, and Bolger appropriates the musical quality of the episode and reproduces it in three different ways. He has an actual backing track playing “an orchestra tuning up” (44). Then he has some of the cast’s voices “merging with disjointed, stop and start music” (44). These voices speak broken lines from the rest of the scene, as a small-scale reprise of the “Prologue” itself. Finally, Bolger has a Chorus of Actresses repeating “Jogajaunty jingled Blazes Boylan” (47) which stands for the sound of Molly’s bedsprings while she makes love with Boylan. This last device especially shows how Bolger uses words and their sounds to create structuring motifs in his adaptation.

The prologue, then, foregrounds two other key aspects of *Ulysses* as well: the dream-like quality of some of its parts, which finds its most heightened expression in “Circe,” and the protean nature of its characters’ minds and bodies, which is best exemplified in “Proteus.” Not surprisingly, the “Proteus” chapter of *Ulysses* is the shortest and most compressed in the adaptation precisely because the ever-changing essence of being and thought, which Stephen’s monologue deals with, ⁹

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⁸ Joyce himself characterised *Ulysses* as “the epic of the human body” (Budgen, 261) and added that “in my book the body lives in and moves through space and is home of a full personality” (261).

⁹ What Bolger retains from the original monologue are specific references to Stephen’s biography. Here we learn that he had to leave Paris to come home and see his dying mother, who appears as a ghost in Bolger’s rendering of “Telemachus” and in “Circe.” Bolger also uses Stephen’s monologue to stress his condition of outcast.
is acted out on the stage. We experience it directly. We visualise it. A brief selection from the list of characters (table 2) shows clearly that the actors will have to play multiple roles throughout the adaptation, enacting physically the shifty/shift ing and overlapping presence of their Joycean counterparts:

A Dublin Bloom has been written for a cast of at least eleven adults, plus one youth and one young girl. The adults (with the exceptions of Leopold Bloom, Molly Bloom and Stephen Dedalus) all play a huge variety of roles. (6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actor A plays:</th>
<th>M’Coy; Cunningham; McHugh; A Diner; Father Commee; Dollard; Bergan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actress A plays:</td>
<td>Martha; Postmistress; The Male Mourner; The Posh Lady; Boylan’s Secretary; Miss Kennedy; Garryowen (the dog)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor B plays:</td>
<td>Lenehan; Banton Lyons; Kelleher; Preacher; A Diner; Sailor; Bob Doran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actress B plays:</td>
<td>Joe Hynes; The Cat; Priest at Funeral; male Works Manager; Josie Breen; Miss Douce</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Excerpt from the List of Characters of *A Dublin Bloom*.

This device is a constant feature of Bolger’s dramatic works and may therefore be seen as one of the bridges which unite him with Joyce and vice versa. In his play *The Lament for Arthur Cleary*, where the eponymous character is a dead Gastarbeiter whose spirit desperately clings to this world, the other characters, named Frontier Guard, Porter and Friend, “play a variety of interchanging roles” (2). In *Walking the Road*, a play set in a Flanders field during the First World War, Frank, a soldier who is slowly dying alone, sees a figure named Companion who is “constantly changing and sometimes unseen” (15) taking on both male and female roles. In *A Dublin Bloom* not only do the actors play multiple roles, they also play animals. Moreover, they play objects as in the “Aeolus” scene, where the actors use their voices and bodies to repre-

when he has him say “[Mulligan] has the key of the tower. I will not sleep there when this night comes” (25).
sent a printing press, a sort of postmodern chorus chanting mankind’s reification:


The first time we see actors as animals is in the very first scene of the adaptation, which corresponds to the “Telemachus” chapter of *Ulysses*. There, two actresses “[drop] down to form the image of a panther” (12), which gives a bodily shape to a nightmare dreamt by Haines, the English medical student living in the Martello tower with Stephen and Mulligan. Significantly, Haines, a representative of English colonialism in *Ulysses*, is never seen or heard in Bolger’s adaptation. This, I would argue, has to do with Bolger’s definition of the Irish national identity throughout his literary output as the identity of a nation within the broader horizon of the European Community. As Fintan O’Toole aptly remarks in his “Introduction” to Bolger’s volume of collected plays *A Dublin Quartet*, Bolger’s characters are “stateless persons, undocumented aliens in their own country […] They are the state of a nation. But they are more than that, too. The very restlessness, the shifting, open […] nature of the world of these plays makes them also European” (6). Excising Haines’s/England’s presence from much of his adaptation of *Ulysses*, Bolger brings to its logical end Joyce’s modernist operation of giving Dublin a prominent literary status among other European

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12 In the same episode, “cast make telephone ringing noise” (35).
11 Another instance of actors playing animals is in Act Two, where Actress A is the Citizen’s dog Garryowen, and she has to “[growl] menacingly at Bloom who enters” (52) Barney Kiernan’s pub.
12 Bernard Benstock defines him “the spokesman for ‘Rule, Britannia’” (15) and, in his analysis of the symbolic values of the sea in “Telemachus,” he argues that “[i]n its political guise [the sea] belongs to the insensitive Sassenach Haines who can patronize the Celts” (16). Likewise, Vincent J. Cheng, in his analysis of the relationship between Stephen, Mulligan and Haines, says “[w]hat Mulligan knows Haines is looking for are the comfortably static images of an essentialized stage Irishness, such as colourful verbal wit (Stephen) and primitive folksy backwardness (old milk-woman)” (247).
capitals. In a postmodern and postcolonial context, Bolger follows Joyce’s example when he gives literary status to his native Finglas, a depressed suburb of Dublin and an area of “Irish reality that has largely been avoided by the theatre heretofore: modern urban life, the new, shifting, unsentimental emigration, the plague of heroin, the realities of poverty at the uneasy edge of the European Community” (4).

So, the concepts of nationhood and citizenship are central to both writers and Bolger finds fertile land in Joyce’s treatment of the topic in “Cyclops,” where the Citizen, the representative par excellence of violent and conservative nationalism, attacks Bloom with a biscuit can after Bloom defines ‘nation’ in inclusive terms as “the same people living in the same place” (55). The Citizen’s reaction is to make Bloom, whose origins are Jewish, a Christ-like scapegoat who deserves crucifixion. And crucifixion is one of the recurrent motifs in Bolger’s adaptation. In his “Lotuseaters” scene, Bloom, after going to the post office to get a letter from his pen pal lover Martha Clifford, feels the urge to have a bath at the local Turkish baths, where actresses “take his weight, rocking him slightly, lulling him, his arms folded across his chest, half lit, Christ-like […] forming [a] shape vaguely reminiscent of a crucifixion” (21-22).

As the adaptation points out, “Cyclops” and “Lotuseaters” share a dream-like quality which borders and plays with the hallucinatory. For example, at the end of the “Cyclops” scene, Bloom as Elijah the prophet “amid clouds of angels ascend[s] to glory at an angle of forty-five degrees over Donohue’s in Little Green Street” (59). Objects and the scenic space display their full protean potential as well: Molly’s bed and the raised area where it stands serve multiple purposes. The bed becomes a post office in the “Lotuseaters” scene, and the raised platform is the space reserved for hallucinations in “Circe.” It is in the “Circe” scene that hallucinations and reality merge, and it is not an easy task to distinguish the one from the other. Bolger tries to help us make sense of

13 In one of his letters to his brother Stanislaus, Joyce famously remarked that “[w]hen you remember that Dublin has been a capital for thousands of years, that it is the “second” city of the British Empire, that it is nearly three times as big as Venice it seems strange that no artist has given it to the world” (Ellmann, 208).
what we see by means of lighting and stage division: “lighting switches, highlighting and distorting the raised bedstead, creating a surreal arena which looks down upon BLOOM and the real street” (71).

Bolger himself, in his novel The Journey Home (1990), gives a description of Dublin at night where, as in Ulysses, its chaotic essence is rendered through a cumulative description of people and their actions. In A Dublin Bloom, the idea of disorder and promiscuity is rendered via lighting and noises: a visual and aural equivalent for the two narratives. In order to prove this point, here are three passages respectively from The Journey Home, Ulysses and A Dublin Bloom, which may serve as evidence of the similarities between Joyce’s and Bolger’s rendering of the unsafe and rather promiscuous atmosphere of Dublin’s night life:

Far below, Dublin was moving towards the violent crescendo to its Friday night. […] Studded punks pissed openly on corners. Glue sniffers stumbled into each other […] Addicts stalked rich-looking tourists. […] pensioners prayed anxiously behind bolted doors, listening for the smash of glasses. In the new disco bars children were queuing, girls of fourteen shoving their way up for last drinks at the bar. (Journey, 35)

[A] crone makes back for her lair […]. A bandy child […] crawls after her in spurts […]. A drunken navy grips with both ends the railings of an area, lurching heavily. […] A plate crashes: a woman screams: a child wails. […] Figures wander, lurk, peer from warrens. (Ulysses, 351)

14 The “Aeolus” scene in the adaptation offers an example of how skilful Bolger is when he combines lighting and sound to recreate the atmosphere of a specific environment. Here the Freeman’s Journal premises and the hustle and bustle of Dublin streets are evoked together: “Lighting crosses stage like sheets off a printing press, the backing track filled with clanking points and huffing trams” (31).

15 The italics are mine and I use them to signal that Fintan O’Toole uses exactly the same words when he defines Bolger’s poetics: “Because Irish reality has become increasingly surreal, the usual division in writing between the realist [and] the fantasist […] has begun to break down. Realism has to become surrealism [and] Dermot Bolger’s work is at the forefront of this development” (“Introduction”, xii-xiii). He also adds that “his realism is not naturalistic. [His] plays are not descriptions of a world; they are forays into it. […] And in [his] plays the dreams come in waves” (xiii). I would simply add that A Dublin Bloom is no exception and that the “Circe” scene best exemplifies the liminality between realism and surrealism which is typical of Bolger’s plays.
[C]issy Caffrey jumps onto what is lit as a run-down street, mumbling rubbish to herself. The lighting is shifty, figures crossing in and out of shadows. There is disjointed raucous laughter, whistles. DEAFDUMB IDIOT stomps about, dribbling, limbs flailing. URCHIN shoves him mercilessly on. (*Bloom*, 69)

Daniel Ferrer keenly notes that “the reader of *Ulysses* has, without realizing it, been in “Circe” for a long time when he reaches chapter fifteen. The setting, the characters, the situations, even the vocabulary are already familiar to him” (128).16 And Bolger seems to share this same feeling because, in his adaptation of the episode, he selects themes and words which resonate throughout *A Dublin Bloom*.17 For example, on page 77 background voices repeat “Cuckoo! Cuckoo! Cuckoo!” and this repeated word gives an aural dimension to the theme of betrayal together with the “jingle jangle” sound of the bedsprings in “Sirens” and elsewhere. Or, we hear Bloom reiterating that he is “being made a scapegoat of” (75), and then we follow him in his many, changing roles as defendant, emperor of the world, or masochistic female slave to Bella Cohen’s will. As the scene draws to a close, he becomes a father figure for Stephen, trying to protect him from the night watch who want to assail him. The scene ends, as in *Ulysses*, with Bloom seeing once again the ghost of his son Rudy: he’s now a father in the biological sense of the word.

16 It must be noted, however, that, in his essay on “Circe, Regret and Regression,” Ferrer argues against adaptations of “Circe” saying that “[it] is literally inseparable from *Ulysses*. Not merely because it is impossible to study it apart, since the chapter is inevitably part of the continuum of *Ulysses*” (128).

17 Bolger also employs here most of the technical devices he uses in the whole adaptation, such as: redistributing lines to different speakers to suit stage needs or giving a body to otherwise unseen characters in *Ulysses*. For example, in order to cut down some male roles in “Circe,” Bolger assigns them to actresses instead of actors. Likewise, Zoe becomes Stephen’s mother and the audience has the chance to see her and hear her voice: a chance which is denied to the readers of *Ulysses*. Furthermore, in “Ithaca”, Bolger gives *Ulysses* catechistic questions and answers to some members of the cast, including “Sailor,” “Jarvey,” the “Keeper” of the Cabman’s Shelter, and Actresses A, B, C, and D.
This brief selection of the roles Bloom himself takes on points to a key feature of the character which Bolger recuperates in the adaptation. Bloom, as conceived by Joyce and then by Bolger, is an “allround man” (Bolger 41), from the Greek polytropos, “versatile.” Fritz Senn, commenting on Joyce’s use of this adjective, remarks that “Bloom is awarded unprecedented scope as a paradigm” (“Book of Many Turns”, 41). Therefore, an “allround man” cannot be defined just in terms of modernism, even though the writer who narrated his journey through Dublin on 16 June 1904 belongs to that literary movement. An “allround man” belongs to any age and forces us to reason in terms of continuity, of flux, rather than in terms of periodization. An “allround man” is complementarily modernist, when he shocks audiences with his farting and pissing and sexual preferences; postmodernist, when he employs the catchy language of advertising to express his thoughts; or even Decadent, when he delights in the contemplation of his “flower” floating amid the perfumed waters of the Turkish bath.

Another polytropic character is Molly Bloom, whose final monologue Joyce describes as “perfectly sane full amoral fertilisable untrustworthy engaging shrewd limited prudent indifferent” (Letters I, 170). Bolger fractures Molly’s monologue in segments which he places in-between scenes, thus fertilising it through the incremental breaking of its meaning, gnomon-wise. André Topia observes that “the formulae Molly uses are never frozen clichés. They are on the contrary extraordinarily original and individualized” (122). In the adaptation, Molly’s monologue serves as counterpoint to the dialogues which are mainly male. In Bolger’s adaptation, Molly’s monologue never interacts with the dialogues it interrupts, thus keeping its own distinct “meandering, relatively unstructured, [...] familiar language” (Topia, 22).

He shows us that her monologue is closely linked to the actions, the events and the thoughts which marked the day. For example, in ‘Scene Eight’ of the adaptation the actress impersonating Molly recites the part

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18 Senn adds that “polytropia in Ulysses is not limited to any one feature, or level, or any person [...]. It is polytropically distributed and incarnated throughout” (“Book of Many Turns”, 46); “Ulysses is Homerically polytropical. Voices change, characters are not fixed, language is versatile and polymorphous” (48).
of ‘Penelope’ which says “yes, they were all in great style this morning at the grand funeral in the paper Boylan brought in” (24). This line points to “Scene Ten” where the funeral actually takes place. Moreover, it refers to Boylan and so the readers/audience know that he and Molly are going to meet later in the day. The nature of their intercourse is made clear at the end of ‘Scene Eight’ where Molly says that they usually ‘do it 4 or 5 times locked in each other arms’ (24). In *A Dublin Bloom* Molly is really Penelope the seamstress, since, as Penelope weaves and undoes her cloth, Molly weaves and undoes her thoughts, adding an extra layer to the intertextuality of the adaptation.

Before moving on to my conclusion, I would like to focus on Julie Sanders’s definition of *Ulysses* in her book on *Adaptation and Appropriation* as “the archetype of the adaptive text,” (5) which she bases on Gérard Genette’s categorization of the novel as “the very type of the self-proclaimed hypertext” and yet as “an extreme case of emancipation from the hypotext” (309). I disagree with Sanders’s definition and I would like to propose my own definition of *Ulysses* as “an archetype of the appropriative text” (my italics), based on Sanders’s definition of appropriation as “a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain” (26). My use of the indefinite article aims to signal that other archetypes of appropriative texts do exist, such as that nightmarish collage of texts which is *Finnegans Wake*. Nonetheless, I couldn’t agree more with Julie Sanders when she states that “*Ulysses* is also a fine example of the sense of play” which, I think, belongs both to the adaptive and the appropriative instinct.

As Richard Ellmann says in his monumental biography, “we are still learning to be Joyce’s contemporaries, to understand our interpreter” (3). And *A Dublin Bloom* is precisely Bolger’s way to draw us nearer to Joyce, who is, as Fritz Senn playfully remarks, “multimedial” (“Foreword”, 1). If Dettmar’s statement that “[m]odernist texts […] always contain the germ of their own Postmodernity” (Dettmar 48) is true, then postmodern stage adaptations of modernist texts, such as Bolger’s, may set in motion a dialogical encounter among texts resulting in a new artistic and critical synthesis, further problematising the modernists’ notion of text, genre and self. And adaptations set in motion precisely
Dermot Bolger’s A Dublin Bloom

that dialogue and comment. As I see them, stage adaptations are a sort of three-dimensional translation as they transpose/translate a novel (or any other work) into the three-dimensional world of the stage. They are also the result of at least three different, yet intertwined, forces at work: the original’s unique mixture of themes, motifs, images, and linguistic choices; the adapter’s idiosyncratic selection of those themes, motifs and images; and his own critical reading of the original. As any translation is to some degree a betrayal of the original, so every adaptation may be seen as a three-dimensional betrayal: A life-giving betrayal which may foreground unusual, unexpected, or even controversial features of an original text.

The usefulness and fruitfulness of a postmodern approach to Joyce’s fiction is keenly summarised by two Joycean scholars: Kevin Dettmar and Derek Attridge. Attridge says that a postmodern approach to Joyce aims at producing “Joyce’s texts in ways designed to challenge rather than to comfort, to antagonize instead of assimilate” (7), and Dettmar argues that “if the official language of Joyce’s criticism […] has always been modernism, then postmodernism provides one alternative avenue of inquiry, one somewhat different language in which we might attempt to (re)articulate Joyce’s texts” (6). And this is exactly what Dermot Bolger does in his adaptation. In conclusion, as it points intertextually both to Bolger’s and Joyce’s literary outputs; as it gives voice to a multitude of characters and problematises the notions of self and identity; as it makes texts argue with each other and with their readers/audience, A Dublin Bloom is a skilful example of a postmodern work of art and of Joycean criticism.

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Dermot Bolger’s A Dublin Bloom


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III. Theatre and other Media: Intermediality
Adaptations of Visual Material: Paintings, Drawings and Maps

1. Introduction

Visual illiteracy dominates drama criticism. Focusing on the questions of adaptation, the present study abandons this prevailing typographic approach to give primacy to the alchemy of the eye.

To proceed with an analysis of the adaptive process of images, it seems necessary to recall at least some statements made in lieu of a definition as the field is broad and amorphous. Linda Hutcheon defines adaptation as “repetition without replication” which is meant to span the “urge to consume and erase the memory of the adapted text” on the one hand and the “desire to pay tribute by copying” on the other (7). Considering the broad context of adapting, one may wonder whether replication in the sense of replica is possible at all. Adaptation can be approached as a product resulting from adjustment/transposition, which often involves various forms of transcoding (7). As a creative process, according to Hutcheon, it consists in re/interpretation motivated by diverse desires. Hence, in Lacanian terms, adaptation would be an unending process.1 Reception of adaptations is unavoidably intertextual – in the present context also interart – and palimpsestic as a result of its references to memory. Gordon Armstrong adds significantly to Hutch-

1 The present discussion refers to the Lacanian concept of desire (83, 115, 214, 235-236) as a guarantee of openness, a suggestion Hutcheon does not acknowledge.
eon’s proposition by assuming that theatre is a proof and a unique expression of our, that is audience's/species', adaptation to “the visible and fictive worlds” (277-278). By this he means mutuality – adaptation involves the audience – and thus an ex definitione interactive mechanism in the reception process.

To sum up, it seems that adaptation as product, process and reception remains permanently open. This openness is corroborated in Hutcheon’s proposition – anchored in postmodernism – which is indicative not only of her general affinity with the earlier Theory of Parody, but also of her insistence on the inadequacy of the “rhetoric of fidelity” (20). Armstrong in turn derives his concept of adaptive system from the scientifically grounded intellectual unpredictability, or indeterminism of relativity theory.

2. Visual Material under Consideration

The visual material the essay focuses on comes from four modern plays. The selection comprises Tom Stoppard’s After Magritte with an adaptation of the famous surrealist L’assasin menace (1926) and dispersed fragments appropriated from several other paintings by René Magritte, for instance Le mois des vendanges (1959), L’histoire centrale (1928), and Le découverte de feu (1934/5). The second example, Shelagh Stephenson’s An Experiment With An Air Pump, refers the viewers to a new type of “moral picture,” a basically affirmative image of the contemporary world, where interactions between private individuals and cultural commodities are staged against the background of the market place rather than grand history. Here the playwright employs the well-known An Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump which, like other paintings by Joseph Wright of Derby, is designed “with the broad constituency of exhibition-goers in mind” (Solkin 214). The third is Edward Bond’s Bingo, subtitled Scenes of Money and Death, which stages a conflation of two exceptional drawings by Rembrandt Harmenszoon Van Rijn depicting the execution of a young woman, Elsje Christiaens, hanged or strangled on cross-like gallows. Finally, Mappa Mundi, also by Stephenson, invites cartographic material whose source images are tangible but to some extent obscured by fictionalisation. Among the specific maps – references to our cultural memory bank – are mappa mundi, whose
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example might be the medieval Hereford Cathedral specimen, Gerard Kremer’s alias Mercator’s scientific Atlas printed already in the Renaissance, as well as later decorative maps where anonymous authors’ imaginations inscribed strange, abject or monstrous creatures either into remote lands and “quares” or into the margins.

3. Reception and performance: concepts of gallery, game and liminality

The variously repeated confrontation of adapted images on loan and performance is essential for the above-mentioned series of examples. The pictures do not appear in a filmic form (though there are projections), and therefore questions concerning the difference of aesthetic experience between theatrical liveness and mediatization are less conspicuous. Still, there are substantial differences in the execution of the visual insets, which call for a comment.

Stoppard’s and Stephenson’s plays open with tableaux vivants, in the former case staged by actors while in the latter staged and projected on the backdrop. Like Stoppard, Bond employs actors. Hence the liveness of theatrical experience is only temporarily suspended in the freeze of projections. However, both in After Magritte and in An Experiment the logic of a tableau vivant expands and is foregrounded consistently throughout the plays. In After Magritte it leads via fragmented references to a series of surreal paintings and thus to the closing image of bewilderment resulting from a failure of language/word/logos to grasp the transformed reality. In Stephenson’s play the freeze effect reappears (cf. 184, 226), indicating the temporal gap between the eighteenth- and the twentieth-century realities co-occurring within the space of a single scene. The defamiliarised freeze becomes a threshold of liminality experienced by characters and, more prominently, perceived by viewers.

Discussing Einar Schleef’s production of Oscar Wilde’s Salome, Erika Fischer-Lichte comments on its failure pointing out that the opening tableau encouraged spectators to contemplate the picture as if they were in a gallery or a museum (64). The ten-minute freeze – a device commonly used by stage and parlor tableaux though rare in drama – was long enough to transfer performance proper from stage to the disappointed auditorium who refused to accept the game of rule swapping. This example illustrates what happens in some cases of visual
adaptation, especially if we assume that it is galleries and museums that are places of silence, contemplation and immobility – not theatres. The effect need not be such although in the eighteenth-century context of artistic and aesthetic autonomy the above-quoted result may be tenable. In Robert Browning’s “My Last Duchess,” the curtained painting – once it is revealed to the visitor – triggers off a series of comments/reactions reflected in the owner’s monologue. Here, the story of aesthetic offence rests also on culturally definable scopic organisation where, even if petrified on canvas, the sitter looks back, thus resisting the overpowering gaze of the male connoisseur who admits ambiguously that the lady glances, “Looking as if she were alive” (“My Last Duchess” 2). Therefore, apart from the individual relation between viewer and artefact, we should consider the order of exhibition in the same way that we recognize the cultural cartography of the theatrical venue.

In terms of a provisional summary, it can be concluded that adapted images on loan do not operate as autonomous prequels or sequels, prologos or proems, even though they may preserve their typical positions. In accordance with Armstrong’s thesis, images are capable of triggering off an adaptive process. Embracing both the stage and the audience, they actualize themselves in the process.

4. The Logic of Tableau Vivant: Meta-Reflection, Art and the Artist, Replica and Desire

If we assume that the above-specified visual material functions as a sort of tableau vivant, it is necessary to investigate exactly how the images operate and are adapted within this genre. Tableau vivant is often referred to as lesser theatre, a spectacle with hardly any words. Still, there is the possibility of a voice-over commentary as in An Experiment. On the other hand, the tableau is grounded in the tradition of intermezzi of pastoral life. A veiled but unmistakably ironic acknowledgement of this tradition emerges from Stephenson’s Experiment in the play-within-the-play where Isobel takes the part of a sheep and therefore of a victim. In spite of their somewhat pejorative assessment, after 1761, living pictures were staged in Paris, Vienna, London and Cracow as part of theatrical...
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productions, opening or closing the evening entertainment. Additionally, they became an increasingly popular social game whose origin was openly announced, according to Małgorzata Komza, as “after” (27) and included not only paintings and statues but also literature (verbal material). Because of the assumed afterness, it is in the logic of living pictures to draw attention to an introverted semiosis that interacts with the aesthetic values and the materiality of the spectacle itself. Further on, in accordance with the same logic, the visual material encourages the audience to inquire about its original author.

The “afterness” analysed by Keir Elam in reference to After Magritte seems to follow the familiar logic of living pictures: chronology, an openly acknowledged indebtedness or homage, and pastiche (471). In his article, Elam soon abandons the strictly visual or iconographic problematic as he is more interested in the common semiotic territory where objects, images and lexical units interchangeably become interpretants (474). The present paper focuses on images, so it seems more important to remember Thelma’s prim though ambivalent admonition that there is no need to use “language” (After 15), meaning verbal language. Stoppard’s farcical comedy, by employing a tableau in agreement with its sub-genre, might have been directed against the verbal tradition of European theatre, sharing thus in the overwhelming sense of exhaustion. If we follow Niall Lucy’s diagnosis, “for language to have meaning, culture has to have value and history has to matter” (49).

Launching a critique of realism and ratiocination, the surrealist imagery in After Magritte disturbs the dominant value system, including the value of history, which shows itself in the numerous allusions to Arthur Conan Doyle’s unfulfilled dream of becoming a historian.

Tableau vivant may be defined – in its afterness – as reproduction, a genuine copy whose value, but also weakness, resides in accuracy or fidelity. Even in that case, however, this derivative, nostalgic image

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2 Highly evaluated as a didactic and even therapeutic device (Komza 273, 325), the tableaux that appeared in cheaper theatres would exhibit women as sexual objects. Elbert explains that “with its insistence upon moral truth and emotional intensity, or pathos, the tableau rather naturally followed the route toward melodrama” (237) often, even if unfairly, referred to as “crude” (Nicol 202).
holds a dream of resurrecting past identities and passions. Hence the image is likely to be staged as a privileged site for a phantasmic representation of memories whose essence is not only what is chronologically over and done, but, perhaps more importantly, what persists as desire – some absence that seeks compensation in homage and indebtedness to another from the past – and thus enables an adapted tableau vivant to become a figure of unactualized utopian wishes (cf. Mappa Mundi). On the other hand, tableau does not appear to be simply reducible to an object it repeats. The living picture seems to reveal qualities that were not fully apparent in the original and are now discovered in/due to the “copy” – as in the genre of portraying that Browning refers to in his poem. Interest, then, is not in overt fidelity but in the difference, in the inherent hesitation and the suspended gesture – that we are also made aware of in “My Last Duchess” – a persistent incompleteness dramatizing a passage from one desire to another and thus an acceptance of the purely histrionic mode of existence. The latter form of adaptation is closer to Elam’s pastiche and to Hutcheon’s parody-anchored concept of adaptation.

In the reality of rhizomatic relations, multiplying family histories and unclear boundaries where Jack, a character in Stephenson’s play, finally loses his bearings (Mappa Mundi 47ff, 78), nostalgia for the past sense of order visible in an obsessive clinging to maps – which supposedly pin things down and put them in order – and family trees justify the appearance of cartographic replicas including that of the eponymous medieval map. The medieval symbolic image represents the theological concept of the world, while Gerard Kremer’s The Mercator Atlas which, as Jack erroneously believes, lets the viewer “hold” the world, provides the scientific concept. The opening tableau reveals a colonial map which differentiates between the centrality of Thomas Goode, the mapmaker alias slave owner, and the monstrous otherness of mermaids and aborigines relegated to its margins (Mappa 17-18). The old man desires to restore his dissolving identity with the help of the evoked cartographic references.

However, even in the replicated “originals” there are “quares” (39), the impenetrable kenotic “nothings”, or the unknown, triggering off ungovernable desires. The uncertainty of their otherness invites unstable
histrionic modes of existence epitomized by Michael’s, that is an actor’s identity. This peculiar, unstable identity consists in the pleasure of simulation (27) which Jack as the “truthful man” despises just as he refuses to accept homosexuals, Muslims, blacks and cripples (69,71). “Dislocated” and obsessed with “who he is,” according to Anna, and feeling “cut adrift,” in Father Rayan’s words, Jack will be offered a peculiar birthday present, a cartographic image of his own life, within which his “invisibility” (34-5) and unpredictable “wave/particle” identity (33) may seem more tangible. However, in the course of the play it becomes obvious that there is neither certainty nor stability in the visually (or verbally) evoked maps, since all of them suffer from dislocations and include “quares” which generate performative identities, as in the eruption of the multicultural crowd of dancers entering the corresponding heterotopia of the garden. Thus, the adapted visual material becomes a generative system that turns family trees into guessing games and sites of persistent, self-multiplying desires.

After Magritte and An Experiment not only stage living pictures but also defamiliarize their technique/logic. Stephenson’s stage directions inform explicitly about the “revolve tableau.” By appropriating the particular images, both plays invite an interplay of replicas which we may refer to as producing sequences of resemblance and of similitude, where the former, in Michel Foucault’s study on Magritte, concerns copies recognizing the presence of a model “that orders and hierarchizes the increasingly less faithful copies” (44). Similitude, on the other hand, prioritises repetition instead of representation and therefore propagates rhizomatically through difference without any hierarchy. In the case of Stoppard’s adaptation of Magritte, with the prequel of the 1969 retrospective in the background, it appears that once the painter has triggered off the tableau mechanism within his oeuvre, the play continues/is infected by this logic, via adaptations of paintings and their fragments, offering still further space for the proliferating sequences. The unhinged generative system seems unstoppable in its persistent search for the solution of a mystery/crime which never took place – another “quare” or “nothing.” An Experiment recalls Joseph Wright’s painting, recognizing immediately a significant absence and, at the same time, a replacement in what one would like to call the “original.” The place of God is
occupied by the scientist and, in the same way as in the later *Mappa Mundi*, the theological order gives in to the relativism of the scientific.

Further replications of the image proceed with seemingly slight but significant differences, following the logic of pastiche, parody or resemblance merging into similitude. The historical, male God-like scientist is supplanted by the contemporary female Ellen who introduces the tableau voicing her desire to become a true scientist. The bird/cockatoo, which once might have been the dove of the Holy Ghost, becomes a pet bird – imprisoned in the air pump – for which the experimenter has no sympathy. In the eighteenth-century part of Stephenson’s play it is replaced by Isobel, the bleating pet-lamb from the play-within-the play, whose fate is predicted as “cutlets” (*An Experiment* 153) and whose incomplete skeleton is discovered in the twentieth-century. References to *The Anatomist* (by James Bridie) and thus to the famous anatomist Dr Robert Knox (perhaps represented as Fenwick), who purchased fresh corpses from body-snatchers or grave robbers (William Burke and William Hare), bring in further bodies. The twentieth century part adds foetuses, cell-clusters, pre-embryos and in-vitros. The originally “moral picture” is rediscovered as incorporating significant absence which, in turn, breeds desire: replicated, actualised or modernised and transmitted by the play.

While in *After Magritte* the visual inset provokes questions concerning a shift from epistemology to ontology, in Stephenson’s play it focuses on moral dilemmas and often specific ethical questions. In the former the journey into the prelogical/prelinguistic can be perceived as an insight into the subconscious or other alternative reality whose principles may turn a detective into an offender. The loss of grand narratives in *An Experiment* produces not only a semiotic territory where objects, words and images become interchangeable, but also a market where deceased bodies, in-vitros and cell clusters are reduced to objects of exchange.

The nexus of death and market – *Scenes of Money and Death* – appears even more prominently in the subtitle of Edward Bond’s drama and is significantly related to the powerful image located centrally (Part I, Scene 3, p.20) in the play, that is to the two central and side view drawings dated *circa* 1664 and sketched by Rembrandt at an execution.
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field. In the *didascalia* the playwright includes rather confusing inventory numbers but points accurately to the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art as their owner. Bond’s effort to provide detailed information concerning the drawings is indispensable if accuracy in their rendering matters. It is most unlikely that a staging of the drawings in the form of a living picture would easily produce the expected *déjà vu* effect. The two drawings have been seldom exhibited and are exceptional in Rembrandt’s oeuvre. As Svetlana Alpers comments, it is exceptional (“[e]ine ungewöhnliche Ausnahme,” 188). However, as in the case of any tableau, and especially if the *déjà vu* is impeded, we tend to inquire more intensively about the origin of the image and the artist trying to investigate the unclear relation of “afterness.” Interestingly, in the guessing game staged by Bond, the logic of internal semiosis identifies the character of Shakespeare which, less obviously than in the preceding examples, replicates the unknown/absent artist.
Under these circumstances, what strikes the viewer, and what is essential in the drawings, becomes also vital for the theatrical rendering: it is the uncommon descriptive clarity and immobility of the object, a technique basically inconsistent with Rembrandt’s style (Alpers 189). The absence the viewer finds disruptive in his/her perception of the image is more abstract and depends on this peculiar stylistic inconsistency definable as absence of theatricalization. Rembrandt’s drawings of Elsje Christiaens were made hastily outside the studio whereas the painter’s routine demanded a transposition of the outside world into a life staged inside the studio and then rendered in the form of either
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drawings or paintings. The further processing of Elsje Christiaens – Alpers claims – leads to the later, explicitly theatricalized, painted images of the suicide of Lucretia where the execution rope from the drawing becomes a part of the posing machinery. The young woman on the cross-like gallows in Bond’s drama is also adapted from Rembrandt, and perhaps adapted primarily as an analogous figure outside Shakespeare’s theatrical world (the other) where even the most violent sports might have become manners of the society – including bear baiting. Like Rembrandt who leaves his studio, Shakespeare is drawn outside the theatrical world of London and beyond the protective boundaries of the Avonian rose garden. The adaptation brings in the drawings, not the Lucretia oil paintings, so that the theatricalization of the image, its complete transcodification into the theatrical, never takes place. Instead, the tableau sustains tension, a pending desire which generates further questions concerning its interpretation – a female figure on cross-like gallows is puzzling and shocking beyond doubt – and leads to other images that the viewer is desperately trying to retrieve from his/her memory bank. The mortified body can be the body of a virile woman, a woman Christ – an image crushed by Reformation (Newman 247); a sympathy-evoking romantic female martyr of the St Julia type; or Antichrist – an androgynous body as in the painting of Jan Zrzawy. There is no single answer and thus the original query concerning the artist and his relation to the model returns. Rembrandt was a businessman and, according to Alpers, he perceived himself as a butcher, a hunter or a surgeon penetrating bodies: the nexus of death and painting is obvious. By recalling the image, perhaps also the story of Elsje (Eghen 74-75), Bond subverts the Shakespeare myth by emphasising the merchant and the traitor figure. The bard becomes responsible for the girl’s execution.

5. From Similitude/Resemblance to Simulacra; Operational Simulacra and the Art of Recycling in the Society of Spectacle

The paintings, maps and drawings incorporated in Stephenson’s, Stoppard’s and Bond’s plays are transcoded in the process of adaptation into living pictures but their focus is not necessarily on the traditional effects of high-cultural tableaux of the Robbe-Grillet type. These adaptations
result in images which internalize their own repetition calling into question the authority/legitimacy and completeness of their model; thus they could be referred to as simulacra staging a cognitive problem concerning the relation to a fragmented post-modern culture, as in *After Magritte*. In the process of adaptation the value of “the original” is undermined and the interest is shifted over to the metamorphic and creative powers of what Deleuze and Foucault would define as the “powers of the false” (Durham 8). The image subjected to this transformative simulation process resembles a larval mask – as used literally in Mark Ravenhill’s *Handbag* – which, having none or losing its identity, passes from one role to another, a situation where the histrionic or performative energy becomes essential. In this process the concept of the “truthful man” as embodiment of the “will to truth” is juxtaposed with that of the artist whose pleasure is in usurpation and in transformative/creative powers of the false/inaccurate. The proliferation of the images generated in this way (cf. *After Magritte* and *Mappa Mundi*) exerts a corrosive effect on the mastering narratives – such as the Shakespeare myth in *Bingo* – and on scopic and temporal organisation. On the other hand, the process of creative simulation becomes first recourse for those who have been consigned marginal status, for instance the migrants and actors in *Mappa Mundi*. The dissolution of stable identities can be painful (see Jack in *Mappa Mundi* or the detective in *After Magritte*) but, at the same time, it can be transformative, providing an occasion for euphoria when, through simulation, the same characters discover themselves as actors and artists in masquerade and performance (Jack, Sholto in *Mappa*, detective in *After*).

Understanding the process of adapting images in terms of simulacra emphasises their liminality, especially when the hierarchical relation between model and copy is suspended or, more specifically, suspended is the relation between language and image, as in *After Magritte*. In the society of spectacle the process encompasses stage and audience. Adaptation of the visual, then, consists in an acknowledgement of the fact that artistic activity persists in recycling and re-enacting. The memory of *afterness* does not concern homage but nostalgia for the moment when simulacra were still problematic. By this we mean that they were orientated towards the metaphysical question of origin.
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preceding the moment they became fully operational. If adaptation is conceived of as a process of recycling and cloning, the presence of death and of the corpse as a springboard of/for transformation and liminality does not come as surprise. Adaptation enters and shares in the logic of recycling, trashing and wasting, the indispensable beginning and outcome of which is the death of the original.

Works Cited

Primary Literature


Secondary Literature


From Screen to Stage:  
The Case of The 39 Steps

1. Films Adapted for the Stage

While the adaptation of successful plays for the screen has been a common practice since the early days of cinema, the reverse process – adapting a film for the stage – is a relatively recent phenomenon. In A Theory of Adaptation, Linda Hutcheon mentions in passing the musical versions of popular films, for instance Sunset Boulevard, Billy Elliot and Dirty Dancing. To this list, the more recent Monty Python’s Spamalot and The Harder They Come may be added, as well as Gone with the Wind, which had to close somewhat prematurely in June 2008. This may be taken as an indicator that the trend is abating; however, a number of stage adaptations of films are still announced to open in the near future, for instance Rain Man (Apollo, 19 September 2008) and a ballet version of Edward Scissorhands (Sadler’s Wells, 3 December 2008).

Stage adaptations of films are not necessarily musicals; David Lynch’s Lost Highway, for instance, was transformed into an opera, which ran at the Young Vic from 4 to 11 April 2008. Some films were adapted into stage plays without any significant amount of singing and dancing, including the Norwegian Elling (Bush, 25 April 2007, transferred Trafalgar Studios 1), the Spanish All About My Mother (Old Vic 5
2. Some Theoretical Assumptions Concerning Plays Adapted from Film

The apparent success of stage adaptations of famous films immediately raises the question of what constitutes the appeal of these productions. Apparently the appeal of a stage performance is not necessarily diminished by the familiarity of its plot, and consequently, that theatre does not largely rely on the element of surprise to achieve its effect. The fact that familiarity of the plot does not necessarily reduce the appeal of a theatrical production would also seem to account for the great number of productions on the West End stage that are based on equally familiar plays, from Christmas pantomime to Shakespeare and the adaptations of famous novels. More often than not, theatre audiences do not come to watch a play, they come to watch a play again, the aspect of repetition apparently working as an incentive rather than a deterrent. In this respect, theatre audiences may be compared to the audiences of cult movies, about whom Richard R. Day remarks: “Attendance at a particular cult move is not a one-time thing. Cult movies attract faithful followers who come time and time again. There is a report of an individ-
ual who claimed to have seen a particular cult movie over 100 times” (Day 215).

The viewing practices of cult movies offer further useful points of comparison. After all, the stage adaptation of famous films may be considered merely an extension of the normal repeated viewing of the same film. As Day points out, the pleasure in watching, for example, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* again and again does not reside in repetition alone. It is necessary that the audience come together in a movie theatre:

> The members of the audience at cult movies [...] form a community. They have come together to experience, to share, and to participate in an event. The cult movie is an event, an activity which is similar to a religious rite and other solidarity displays in which the basic goal is the establishment, maintenance, and celebration of a community. (Day 215)

The term “to participate” is especially relevant with respect to *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, because the spectators regularly indulge in participatory activities – shouting, singing along, throwing rice and dressing up as the central characters of the action. Even though the general atmosphere at stage performances of famous films and the extent of audience participation may be a bit more subdued, the basic principle remains the same: the stage performance of a film classic represents a ritual re-enactment of shared popular myths.

This assumption may explain the comparative success of stage adaptations of British films on the London stage. Among the musical adaptations, *Billy Elliot* and *Monty Python’s Spamalot* were based on British sources, the productions by Kneehigh and Red Shift used films of British directors exclusively, and *The 39 Steps* had a considerably longer run than *Elling, All About My Mother* or *Swimming with Sharks*.

As Day explains, the audiences of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* consist of the initiated and novitiates, brought along by the initiated and taken up into the community. A similar system of audience-gathering may be assumed for the stage adaptations of famous films. Conspicuously, most of the British films that became sources of stage productions are already rather old – in this case, it may be suspected that frequently parents bring their children or teachers their pupils to watch the performance. Consequently, these plays may play an important part
Beatrix Hesse

in passing on artefacts that have become parts of the cultural heritage, and embodiments of cultural values, from generation to generation.

Though it is apparently indispensable to choose a suitable film as the source of a stage production, the performance has yet a number of other requirements to fulfil. First of all, the plot of the film must be rendered in its entirety, because members of the audience familiar with the original source will feel cheated if anything is left out. Secondly, the stage production must, in some way, produce a “surplus value,” or else audiences may feel that they might just as easily have watched the original on DVD. In the case of musical adaptations, the surplus value is obvious when live singing and dancing is added.

As will be demonstrated in the following, some stage adaptations of films are successful, not because they include additional material, but because they offer less than the original film. Jerzy Grotowski’s observations on theatre in an era in which it is forced to compete with film and TV are curiously pertinent to the stage adaptations of films, in which theatre implicitly accepts the challenge to do everything film can do. Grotowski’s ‘poor theatre’

challenges the notion of theatre as a synthesis of disparate creative disciplines – literature, sculpture, painting, architecture, lighting, acting (under the direction of a metteur-en-scène). This ‘synthetic theatre’ is the contemporary theatre, which we readily call the ‘Rich Theatre’ – rich in flaws. The Rich Theatre depends on artistic kleptomania, drawing from other disciplines, constructing hybrid-spectacles, conglomerates without backbone or integrity, yet presented as an organic art-work. By multiplying assimilated elements, the Rich Theatre tries to escape the impasse presented by movies and television. Since film and TV excel in the area of mechanical functions (montage, instantaneous change of place, etc.), the Rich Theatre countered with a blatantly compensatory call for ‘total theatre.’ The integration of borrowed mechanisms (movie screens onstage, for example) means a sophisticated technical plant, permitting great mobility and dynamism. And if the stage and/or auditorium were mobile, constantly changing perspective would be possible. This is all nonsense. No matter how much theatre expands and exploits its mechanical resources, it will remain technologically inferior to film and television. Consequently, I propose poverty in theatre. (Grotowski 19)

What a present-day adaptor of a film for the stage can learn from Grotowski and his poor theatre is to refrain from using a sophisticated
stage technology and instead rely on theatre’s main strength, the
presence of live performers sharing the same space with the audience.

Even though it has been stated above that the plot of a film must be
rendered in its entirety, a stage adaptation may occasionally depart
deliberately from its source film. Kneehigh’s adaptation of A Matter of
Life and Death, for instance, went against the grain of the unambiguous
patriotism of the original film by giving a voice to the German victims
of the Dresden bombing. This demonstrates how the stage adaptation of
a film classic may attain a critical stance towards its source text and thus
make spectators view the film in a new light. This critical attitude, of
course, does not always have to consist of questioning the political
values of the source film but may, somewhat more implicitly, be in
evidence in the highlighting of specific thematic or formal concerns of
the original.

To sum up: in a stage adaptation of a famous film, we may expect to
find:
– a familiar plot, which is rendered in its entirety;
– a performance that is “ritualistic” and festive in character and offers
opportunities for audience participation;
– some “surplus value,” consisting for instance of song-and-dance
routines; or, alternatively, a deliberate renunciation of technology and a
focus on the actor;
– some inherent criticism of the source film.

3. The Example of The 39 Steps

After these theoretical considerations, the second part of my article will
be devoted to one specific case study, Patrick Barlow’s stage version of
Alfred Hitchcock’s 1935 film The 39 Steps. The film is widely known
and popular, as evidenced by a British Film Institute opinion poll of
1999, in which it came in fourth. Interestingly, this film was itself an
adaptation of the 1914 novel by John Buchan. Hitchcock’s film, how-
ever, markedly departed from its source, as Stuart Y. McDougal has
observed:

[Hitchcock] decided to eliminate the political assassination, simplify the con-
spicacy, and shift the focus from the spies to the ‘innocent’ protagonist, thereby
removing the problem of detecting the spies as well as the spies’ attempt to es-
cape the country by boat. The ‘thirty-nine steps’ no longer identified a geographical location but merely became the means of exposing the villain, who is easily recognizable in the film by the partial amputation of his little finger. (McDougal 37)

McDougal also points out the episodic structure of the film, its focus on the male-female relationship, and the music hall setting that serves as a frame to the whole of the action. What Hitchcock took over from Buchan was therefore mainly the central plot dynamics of an innocent man trying to clear himself of a murder charge and the episodic structure, which Hitchcock himself considered the main attraction of the book (cf. Durgnat 125f.). Another element of Buchan’s novel that attracted Hitchcock and that was consequently taken over into the film version was the plot motif of role-playing: in the course of the action, the protagonist Richard Hannay dons various disguises and plays the parts of e.g. a milkman and a speaker at a political rally – to which Hitchcock added the parts of a newly-wed husband, a serial killer, and a married woman’s lover.

The concept for the stage adaptation of *The 39 Steps* was first developed as early as 1995 by Nobby Dimon and Simon Corble, who based their version on Buchan’s novel as well as on Hitchcock’s film. The number of actors was limited to four – three men and one woman – and the production successfully toured a number of smaller venues. Producer Edward Snape then commissioned the actor and writer Patrick Barlow to write a new stage adaptation of *The 39 Steps*. For his version, Barlow used the Hitchcock film as his main source, claiming that “the film is more inherently dramatic” (*The 39 Steps Teaching Resource Pack* 3). Barlow’s choice of the film over the novel reflects a general trend, as Linda Hutcheon has observed: “when later writers reworked – for radio, stage, and even screen – John Buchan’s 1914 novel, *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, they often adapted Alfred Hitchcock’s dark and cynical 1935 film adaptation along with the novel” (21). As the success of the Barlow stage version suggests, the film does not merely compete with the novel on equal terms but already seems to have superseded the book in the collective imagination.

Barlow’s *The 39 Steps* opened at the Tricycle, Kilburn, in August 2006 and later transferred to the Criterion in the London West End, where it is currently running. The production, directed by Maria Aitken,
was both financially successful and critically acclaimed – Barlow won an Olivier Award and a What’s Onstage Award for Best New Comedy for his adaptation. The press reviews above all stress the festive character of the performance, calling it “joyous” (Sunday Times), “uproariously jolly” (Guardian) and “dizzyingly entertaining” (Daily Telegraph). Several (re)viewers compared it to Christmas pantomime; stage manager Luke Day calls it “an alternative panto” (The 39 Steps Teaching Resource Pack 14) while British Theatre Guide reviewers John Thaxter and Philip Fisher observe that it “deserves to make its reappearance as popular Christmas fare” (Thaxter, in August 2006) and that it “should do well in this small West End house in the run-up to Christmas” (Fisher, after the transfer to the Criterion). This persistent reference to Christmas – in the first case, as early as August – may, at first glance, appear baffling, but the Hitchcock film version of The 39 Steps is regularly shown on British TV at Christmas and has therefore come to be associated with this particular festive occasion.

The reviews also reveal that the main appeal of the stage production resides in the apparent impossibility of the intermedial transfer of The 39 Steps from screen to stage. The Official London Theatre Guide advertises the show as follows:

The ‘unstageable’ thriller is staged, with four cast members playing 150 roles and every memorable scene from the Hitchcock film: the chase on the Flying Scotsman, the escape on the Forth Bridge, the death defying finale at the London Palladium and the first theatrical bi-plane crash!

Other reviews also underline the importance of the completeness of the plot as well as the aspect of competition between the media of film and theatre: “Nothing has been cut from this hilarious and spectacular version of Britain’s most spell-binding thriller” promises www.viewlondon.co.uk, and www.londontheatrebookings.com states that “Barlow’s adaptation […] promises to be as exciting as anything previously seen on screen.”

An aspect of the performance that earns particular critical praise is the deliberate renunciation of sophisticated stage technology. Theatre.com critic Mark Cook (quoted on london.broadway.com) writes: “A scene on board a train is atmospherically staged with steam and flickering lights, and climaxes with an extraordinarily convincing train-top
sequence with minimal fuss or effect. [...] An aerial chase is even realised with lo-tech shadow puppetry." And Natasha Tripney, writing on musicOMH.com, observes: “Designer Peter McKintosh keeps the set simple, and clothes and props are thrown about with abandon – a few handy chairs becoming a car at one point, and a couple of ladders becoming a stand in for Forth Bridge.” The Teaching Resource Pack for the production characterizes the relationship between the film and the stage version as follows:

It is [...] an affectionate and very funny transposition of the film on to the stage. The film contains set pieces that are iconic: the train top chase, the Forth Bridge escape, Mr Memory at the Palladium. Much of the joy in the show is in seeing these moments recreated through the physicality and vocal talent of the 4 performers. (The 39 Steps Teaching Resource Pack 4)

In all these statements, the theories of Grotowski’s “poor theatre” are more or less in evidence: since theatre cannot compete with cinema in terms of technology, it must fall back on its main strength, which is the live presence of the performer.

The relationship between the film and the stage version, however, is more complex, since in Barlow’s production the doctrine of absolute faithfulness to the cinematic source is imposed only to be exploited for all its comic potential, as the following examples will illustrate:

1. When Annabella Smith tells Richard Hannay that two men are pursuing her, he looks out of the window and indeed sees two sinister men in trenchcoats standing under a streetlight. In the stage version, Hannay moves to the window, and two sinister men in trenchcoats rush onto the scene, carrying their streetlight. This visual joke comments on one particular intermedial difference between theatre and film: there is no editing on stage, hence theatre is much less able to manipulate the perspective of the audience and direct the gaze of the viewer.

2. When two sinister men in trenchcoats urge Pamela and Hannay to “get into the car,” the car has to be created out of four chairs and a steering wheel held by the driver. This is one instance of the techniques of the “poor theatre” praised by reviewers and at the same time reminiscent of a pleasant regression into childhood with its play of make-believe. Apart from that, this scene also comments on another intermedial difference between theatre and film – film’s supposedly superior
ability in rendering movement and speed. Since the “car” faces the audience and it is night, the car would look just as stationary on film as it does on stage.

3. The scene of Hannay’s flight across the Scottish heath is rendered by shadow puppetry and radio announcements that reveal an ironic, tongue-in-cheek attitude towards the film, as for instance when Hannay is described as “looking rather attractive with his little moustache.” This is not merely another example of low-key technology – the device of shadow play appears to deliberately contest cinema’s claim to superior realism. A film, this scene seems to declare, is only shadow play after all, while there are real people here on stage.

4. Stage Adaptation as Criticism of the Film

As has been argued above, the stage adaptation of a film may assume a critical stance towards its source by changing or highlighting specific thematic or formal aspects of the film. The stage version of The 39 Steps attained a critical attitude towards the source film largely by highlighting certain elements of the Hitchcock film. The three most conspicuous aspects will be discussed in the following section.

4.1 Woman Characters

One of the most notable changes from Buchan’s novel to Hitchcock’s film The 39 Steps is the addition of a number of woman characters. While Buchan, writing in WWI, had created a world without women, Hitchcock’s film concentrates on the relationship between men and women. In the film, Richard Hannay encounters three women: the femme fatale Annabella Smith (played by Lucie Mannheim), a professional spy and adventuress, who makes sexual advances to Hannay; the victimized crofter’s wife (played by Peggy Ashcroft), who is married to a mean, narrow-minded Calvinist husband, longs to see life and timidly flirts with Hannay; and, finally, the well-behaved upper-class girl Pamela (played by Madeleine Carroll), who resists Hannay’s sexual assault.

On stage, these three women are played by the same actress, which clearly reveals that they are conceived as a succession of women only relevant in relation to Hannay, who “stays the same” (i.e., is played by the same actor) throughout. This impression conforms to McDougal’s
observation that the “series of relationships that pass before him [...] during the rest of the film provides negative examples that ultimately help him define his relationship with Pamela” (40f; italics mine). The love-interest in the film almost resembles an experimental set-up with the wrong women tried out and discarded until the right woman has been found. The first woman is “the wrong woman” because she is a foreigner of dubious principles and because she is sexually aggressive, the second woman is “wrong,” because she is married, plainly dressed, and would also seem to welcome Hannay’s advances. These two women end up victims of male violence: Annabella Smith is stabbed, and Margaret, the crofter’s wife, is beaten up by her jealous husband. (In both cases, Hannay may be partly to blame for creating the impression of a sexual relationship without consummating it.) Pamela is sexually defensive towards Hannay, who treats her with playful menace, and this singles her out as the “right woman” who will survive unscathed and get the hero.

Madeleine Carroll’s position as Hannay’s real love interest is obvious from the start, not merely because she is the film’s leading lady, but also because she is a blonde – even though Hitchcock’s penchant for blondes was not such a by-word in 1935 as it is today. The aspect of “trying-out” various female roles against a more or less responsive male becomes even more conspicuous on stage when the parts are all played by the same actress who merely changes costume, make-up and body language. When the actress performs the part of “the blonde,” she merely puts on a wig that shines a bright platinum on stage.

4.2 Metatheatricality

In his analysis in *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock*, Donald Spoto points out that “The Thirty-Nine Steps begins and ends in a theatre...” (Spoto 38). This is remarkable because it reveals Hitchcock’s continuing interest in theatricality. (Other Hitchcock films with a theatre setting are for instance *Murder!, Stage Fright* and *Torn Curtain*.) In the stage adaptation of *The 39 Steps*, the intermedial transfer from cinema to theatre creates an additional element of self-referentiality. Like the hapless theatre critics in Tom Stoppard’s *The Real Inspector Hound*, Hannay becomes involved in the thriller action because he cannot resist the
appeal of audience participation. In the first scene of the film, he attends a music hall performance in which “Mr. Memory,” a man with an encyclopaedic knowledge of trivia, offers to answer chance questions from the audience. Hannay asks “How far is Winnipeg from Montreal?,” and this is when the camera first takes full notice of him. It is also the moment when Annabella Smith chooses him to confide in, since his question reveals him to be a Canadian and hence an (presumably safe) outsider in the game of espionage. “[T]he passive, uninvolved spectator [has] suddenly become a participant in the action” (McDougal 39). McDougal sums up the initial sequence of events, from the music hall to Annabella’s death. As the action progresses, Hannay is forced to perform a succession of roles – milkman, politician, bridegroom – and his initial act of audience participation forces him to become an actor himself. This transformation from spectator to actor acquires a particular poignancy in a live theatre performance, and even more so in a play like *The 39 Steps* that relies so strongly on audience involvement. One form of audience participation is Mr. Memory’s direct audience address in the theatre. More importantly, the perceived gap between the theatrical representation and the original film makes it necessary for the audience to contribute their imaginative faculties, in order to see a car while there are only four chairs and a steering wheel visible on stage. While the format of the production encourages audience involvement, the plot revolving around the fate of Richard Hannay delivers an ironic warning to the audience not to get carried away by the action on stage.

4.3 Severed Hands

The showdown of the stage version of *The 39 Steps* contains one veritable surprise: all four actors are on stage when the villain is shot by a single arm coming through the curtains. Even though the spectators are supposedly familiar with the film and have hence been expecting the shot, it comes as a genuine surprise, because the audience has by now become used to counting the actors and has registered that there is no spare one left. Apart from providing surprise in otherwise perfectly predictable entertainment, the “severed arm” delivering the shot also points to a particular stylistic device Hitchcock employs in his film: the frequent display of a “severed hand” in a frame.
At this point, it is perhaps necessary to explain why it is admissible to use an individual frame as the basis for analysis and interpretation. In contrast to other directors, who tend to shoot the same scene from various angles and only select and assemble the material during the editing process, Hitchcock is famous for using a storyboard with sketches for the composition of each individual shot. Since the composition of every individual frame may hence be considered intentional, it has also come to be considered as meaningful.

A shot showing just a single hand, however, is hardly an unusual thing in any film – in *The 39 Steps*, it is significant because the device occurs at particularly prominent points in the action, as the following examples will show:

1. Stuart McDougal’s synopsis of the film starts as follows: “The film begins with the flashing letters M-U-S-I-C-H-A-L moving from right to left across the screen. The hands of an unidentified spectator are seen buying a ticket, and the camera follows his legs and torso as he enters the theater and takes his seat” (38). The words “unidentified spectator” are important: we see these hands performing an action before we have had time to recognize the owner of these hands as Robert Donat, the male lead.

2. “In an insert, a hand fires a gun as two shots ring out” (Rothman 117). Again, the hand is unidentified and unidentifiable – it is even gloved – and it is not until later that we discover it was Annabella’s. (Or, at least, Annabella claims it was she who fired the two shots.) Later, after her death, Annabella’s hand will be shown again in close-up, clutching a map of Scotland, thus terminating the expository sequence.

3. The villain reveals himself by presenting his maimed hand: the top joint of his little finger is missing. Rothman comments: “This is the celebrated moment in the film. Everyone remembers it as a classic example of the Hitchcock ‘thrill’” (144). In the final scene at the London Palladium, a close-up of the villain’s maimed hand will announce his presence. In giving the villain a distinctive feature that renders him instantly recognizable, Hitchcock departs from Buchan’s source. In the novel, the main villain is a master of mimicry, and even Hannay, who has seen him before, fails to recognize him when they meet for the second time. In the film version, the visual image of the
missing limb self-consciously points to the editing technique that severs hands from bodies.

4. On their flight, Hannay and Pamela are handcuffed together – a major plot motif that figured prominently in the advertising for the film, partly because of its erotic overtones. The handcuff-motif occasioned further shots of severed hands. The scene in which Hannay and Pamela spend the night together in an inn, handicapped by their handcuffs, is described in great detail by Rothman:

The camera tilts down to frame the memorable image of Pamela’s hand slipping off her stockings, while Hannay’s hand – manacled to hers – hangs limply. When the first stocking is off, his hand grabs her naked knee, and she thrusts a sandwich into it. When the second stocking is off, she takes the sandwich back, not missing a beat. […] When Hannay keeps his hand limp, he means to suggest that he is not in the slightest aroused by Pamela’s proximity. True, his limp hand comes to life when it touches her flesh. But its arousal does not constitute Hannay’s making a pass. The joking implication is that Hannay is a gentleman, but his hand, aroused by the touch of a woman’s flesh, acts on its own, independent of his will. (158)

This description has been quoted at length, because it points to a possible reading of the prominent motif of the severed hand. In the scene described by Rothman, the motif of the severed hand seems to be used to demonstrate the complex relationship between intention and action.

In this context, it may be interesting to note that the motif of the severed hand as a cinematic trope for the separation of action from intention had been established some ten years earlier by Robert Wiene’s film *Orlacs Hände*. The plot may be summed up briefly as follows: A pianist loses his hands in a train wreck and has a pair of new hands transplanted. They are, however, the hands of a murderer – or so Orlac is led to believe. Henceforth, he experiences his hands as having a will of their own and is haunted by the fear of becoming a murderer against his will. (It is very likely that Hitchcock knew *Orlacs Hände* – he had been working in Germany in the years 1925 and 1926, and variously expressed his admiration for the German filmmakers of the period. *Orlacs Hände* had made quite an impact, and at the time of shooting *The 39 Steps*, it was just being remade by Hollywood under the title of “Mad Love,” starring Peter Lorre.)
In *The 39 Steps*, the motif of the severed hand may initially be an ironic illustration of the terms “secret agent” and “whodunit” that figure so prominently in the genre of the thriller, both referring to the difficulty of tracing back an action to its perpetrator. In Hitchcock’s oeuvre, the identification of the author of an action is usually anything but easy. What first intrigued the French critics of the *Cahiers du Cinema*, particularly Eric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol (to whom Hitchcock owes his somewhat belated recognition as a major filmmaker), was the theme of the “transference of guilt,” which Raymond Durgnat summarily explains as follows:

In Hitchcock’s films they [Rohmer and Chabrol] felt that they discerned a consistent theme of a transference of guilt, such that the apparently innocent are also partly guilty, that curious affinities between heroes and villains appear, and that the villains incarnate temptations to which, on some secret or unconscious level, the heroes have yielded, and for which they must be memorably punished, or from which they must be purified, by some sort of trial, concluding in a chastening awareness. (23)

The cinematic trope of the severed hand, however, seems to signify not a “transference of guilt” but rather what I would call the “denial of agency.” In a considerable portion of Hitchcock’s films, characters suffer from unacknowledged guilt like the murderesses who escape punishment in *Blackmail*, *Sabotage* or *Under Capricorn*. *Spellbound* and *Marnie* revolve around the traumatic aftermath of a killing committed in childhood. A particularly interesting case of “denial of agency” occurs in *Rebecca*, when Maxim confesses to killing his wife but still claims that she was the “secret agent,” and that she deliberately made him kill her.

Another striking example of denial of agency appears in the penultimate scene of *Psycho*, a film frequently considered the apex of Hitchcock’s work. Norman Bates, the murderer with the split identity, has been arrested and is now completely transformed into his murderous mother. While Bates stares into the camera, we hear “Mummy’s” voice in voice-over: “Let them see what kind of person I am. Why, I’m not even going to swat that fly. I hope they are watching. They’ll see. They’ll see and they’ll know and they’ll say, ‘Why, she wouldn’t even harm a fly!’” During this speech, a close-up of Norman’s hand with a fly settling on it is inserted. Not only is this another prominent instance of the severed hand, it also shows two different types of denial of agency:
passivity (refusal to act) and denial (refusal to acknowledge having acted).

It is remarkable that the motif of the severed hand occurs as early as in *The 39 Steps*, which at first glance would seem to be such a harmless film, so much less problematic in its treatment of guilt and responsibility. The severed hands subtly undermine this security, even though we are reassured that, in spite of the complicated relations between intention, action and manipulation, the villain will always be recognizable by his maimed hand. If we take the hand to be representative of a person’s actions, Hitchcock’s departure from Buchan’s novel takes up a specific significance. In the universe of the film *The 39 Steps*, a man is known not by what he is (or pretends to be) but by what he does. As these observations show, one of the main pleasures of watching a film adapted for the stage is that it allows us to see an old, overly familiar classic with a fresh eye.

Works Cited

*Primary Literature*


*Secondary Literature*

Performance Meets Activism: The Billionaires for Bush’s Spectacles of Protest

1. Introduction

Political television advertising is an essential component of American Electoral campaigns. On American television, the so called 30-second TV spot has become a very popular political form of expression. In 2004, the progressive activist network with the irritating name Billionaires for Bush produced a video clip that at first glance looks like one of these commercials for the 2004 election of George W. Bush. The clip is called “Just like us” and shows a middle-aged man in a business suit who sits behind his office desk. The camera depicts the man head-on, occupying the position of a vis-à-vis. Hence, we can see the back of a photograph on the left hand side of his desk, while the right hand side presents the back of a computer monitor. During the short clip, medium shots and close ups evoke the effect that the viewer actually gets a very close, proximate glimpse of the “private” person behind the business man in his office. Thus, the camera work reinforces the speech of the man. From behind his desk he tells us the following:

Hi, I am Bob Reynolds. Like you, I’ve got loved ones in Iraq and I am concerned for their safety. And just like you I am thinking, maybe this war isn’t worth it. But George Bush understands people like us, and that’s why more than $20 billion of taxpayers’ money for rebuilding Iraq go directly to our country. Now that’s worth it! And that’s why I support George Bush, because he is just like us.

When the man says “I’ve got loved ones in Iraq” we actually get to see the front of the photograph which does not depict any of his relatives or friends, but an oil pump. The video ends with the fading in of the
Instead of straightforwardly articulating their points of critique of current politics – namely the misuse of taxpayers’ money and the preferential treatment of taxpayers with high income – the clip employs a more subtle strategy. Since the clip maintains the conventional design of political TV ads, it is not immediately identifiable as the work of activists protesting against President Bush’s politics. It is only when Bob Reynolds speaks about his ‘loved ones’ and instead of those we see an oil pump, visual imagery and narrative contradict each other and the ironic stance of the clip comes to fore. As the video clip illustrates, instead of straightforwardly articulating their critique of Bush’s politics, the activists use humor and parody to make their argument. Hence, instead of voicing overt and rational critique, the Billionaires not only imitate the rhetoric, appearance and gestures of their subject of critique, but also appropriate the media format of political campaigning.

This essay examines the Billionaires for Bush’s mock electoral campaigns (both in the streets and in various media) and analyzes how such parodic appropriations as well as the inclusion of theater alter the perception of protest and political critique in the public sphere. Here, I want to use the term “appropriation” to refer to a cultural practice, in which material from one context is incorporated into another one. Instead of a mere imitation, in which the original source is still visible, appropriation “frequently affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain” (Sanders 26). An appropriation becomes a form of parody when this ‘journey away from the informing source’ not only transforms the original but at the same time also represents a comment or critique which is articulated in a humorous form of “mocking imitation” (Dentith 193). I argue that by appropriating, that is by humourously imitating dominant political rhetoric as well as media formats, the activists’

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1 Here, my essay ties in with theater scholar L. M. Bogad’s study on “electoral guerrilla theater.” (2005) Bogad defines this form of theater as “a hybrid measure that merges the traditions and techniques of ‘third-party’ electoral intervention with grassroots direct action and performative disruption” (Bogad 3).
network Billionaires for Bush not only changes the face and reception of political activism in public space but, more importantly, also opens up spaces of agency and empowerment that political theatre usually lacks. Hence, this essay wants to present the Billionaires’ street and media theater as a cultural twilight zone in which conventional notions of theater and political protest merge into a hybrid form of activist performance or performance activism.


Billionaires for Bush are a grassroots network which initially consisted of designers, media producers and street theater activists and was established before the presidential election in 2000. At first glance, the Billionaires’ campaign is not distinguishable from any ‘real’ electoral or political campaign; they have bumper stickers, slogans, posters, banners and a corporate logo depicting a piggy bank overflowing with money, alluding to the colors as well as the stars of the American flag and imitating the heraldic animal of the Republican Party (fig. 1).

Dressed in dinner jackets, drinking champagne and smoking cigars, the Billionaires for Bush appear in public as rich entrepreneurs supporting the Bush administration (fig. 2, below).
Here, their ‘disguise’ as electoral campaigners and their ironic exaggeration of Bush’s politics actually reveal the group’s criticism of just these politics: “Billionaires for Bush - government of, by and for the corporations” (Billionaires for Bush “Official Logos and Web Banners”).

On 18 Feb. 2004, Karl Rove, former political advisor of President Bush, attends a fund-raising reception in Manhattan. While the event is in progress, outside of the building a strange scene occurs: On one side of the street, people line up in front of the event’s location to be permitted entrance to the reception, while on the other side of the street several protesters gather to demonstrate against Rove’s and government’s politics. The protesters belong to the environmental organization Sierra Club and they gather at the other side of the street to express
their critique of the government’s misleading statements concerning the
safety of lower Manhattan in the wake of Sep. 11, 2001. Ș

But then, the Billionaires for Bush appear and mingle with the invited
guests in front of the hotel. While the environmental protesters on one
side of the street are straight away recognizable as activists, Billionaires
for Bush wear tuxedos and dinner jackets. This might also be the reason
why the security staff allowed the (Billionaire-) activists to gather in
front of the club where they soon unrolled a large trademark Billionaires
for Bush banner. Of course, soon thereafter, the Billionaires, too were
banned to the other side of the street. Nevertheless, standing side by
side, the contrast between the Sierra Club protesters and the Billionaires
could not be starker. The dressed-up actors with color printed placards
and banners join the protesters (in street clothes) who hold up their
hand crafted posters. But the spectacle is not over yet. The New York
Times reports the following:

A black town car pulled up and out stepped a man whom the crowd assumed to
be Mr. Rove. […] Reporters, photographers and television cameramen swarmed
the man, but the police pushed them back. Another man lifted the velvet rope to
let him enter. But the would-be Mr. Rove walked over to the crowd of protesters
and began shaking hands […]. (Slackman and Moynihan)

According to Andrew Boyd’s account of the event, the environmental
protesters greeted the approaching Karl Rove double with shouts of
“Shame, shame!” while he was shaking the Billionaires’ hands. “The TV
media crushed in to capture the scene. He turned to the cameras: ‘These
are my supporters.’ […] Finally, with a big wink, he revealed himself to
be Tony Torn, professional actor, stealth Billionaire […]” (Boyd quoted
in Bond and Frank).

Besides fooling other protesters, the invited guests and security staff,
above all, the Karl Rove look-alike (who was a Billionaires’ activist) also
creates a powerful media image. When the fake Rove crosses the street
to shake the Billionaires’ hands not only does this kind of “invisible

Ș Indymedia filmmaker Julie Tseselsky recorded the event. The video can be
watched on the homepage of the Billionaires for Bush (cf. Tseselsky “Welcome Karl
Rove”). The following description of the event is based on this recording.
theater” (Boal)\(^3\) effectively blur distinctions between staged event and ‘authentic’ political protest, but likewise, he also redirects the media’s attention towards the protesters’ concerns, namely that Rove’s politics only nurture the wealthy few. The Sierra Club protesters articulate their critique of Rove’s politics in a straightforward and rational manner. Their posters, for example, read demands such as “Clean the 9-11 dust” or “Truth or dare – tell us what happened.” In contrast, the Billionaires for Bush employed a different aesthetic to convey their message: Instead of didactically (and rather boringly) wagging a sign transporting this message, both the Karl Rove impersonator and the other Billionaires’ activists used theater and parody as a means of protest. While the Sierra Club protesters blame government’s politics and want to reveal the “truth,” the Billionaires use illusion and spectacle as a means of expressing their political critique.

In 1967, Guy Debord begins his *The Society of the Spectacle* with the first of his 211 theses: “Everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation” (# 1) according to Debord, the spectacle is not only a media phenomenon but also “a social relation between people that is mediated by images” (# 4). Considering human agency and empowerment Debord describes a condition in which the individual has lost his capacity of being active, s/he is condemned in the passive role of watching the spectacle being presented to him (# 30).

The Sierra Club activists seem to share Debord’s despise of the spectacle as being deceptive and an alienation of the individual from his/her own life and desires. But while the Sierra Club protesters shout “We want the truth and we want it now!” the Billionaires for Bush simply respond: “Buy your own president!” (cf. Slackman and Moynihan).

In his 2007 publication *Dream: Re-Imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy* activist and NYU professor Stephen Duncombe elaborates on a notion of spectacle which does not stand in opposition

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\(^3\) This form of theater was developed by Brazilian theater director Augusto Boal in the 1970s. Invisible theater is a form of theater in public space, where the audience is at first sight not aware that they are witnessing a theatrical spectacle. The aim of this theater is to involve the audience into the action and to stimulate an exchange or dialogue between actors and audience (cf. Boal 1994).
to an activist agenda. Duncombe advocates a spectacle of dissent. He argues:

What is spectacle? By default most people think of throwing Christians to the lions, parading missiles through Red Square, or maybe the Ice Capades. But spectacle is something more. It is a way of making an argument. Not through appeals to reason, rationality and self-evident truth, but instead through [...] imagination and fantasy. [...] If progressives are going to take power and politics seriously, we need to learn to use spectacle not grudging but enthusiastically and free of guilt. We need to make spectacle our own.” (Duncombe 29f)

What Duncombe calls for, namely, that activists shall make use of spectacle and other creative means of expressing political critique, seems to be put into practice by the Billionaires for Bush's performances. Instead of a didactic, reasonable argument, they create activist spectacles which appeal to both the passer-bys in the street and to the workings of the media.4

Here, one could also say that both the Billionaires’ 30-second ad and their calculated and staged appearances in public space function as Trojan horses.5 By, for example, appropriating the outward appearance of Karl Rove, the activists invade and gain access into a system, namely the media. Once inside, the Trojan horse drops its masquerade and, as its true identity and intentions are revealed, it ‘attacks’ from within.6 Of course, this ‘attack’ can always only be a symbolic one.

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4 While, for example, the New York Times report on the Karl Rove fundraising event only marginally mentions the environmental organization’s protest, the fake Karl Rove appearance is elaborated on in great detail (cf. Slackman and Moynihan).

5 This idea is inspired by art critic Lucy Lippard, who began her 1984 essay on activist art with the observation: “Maybe the Trojan Horse was the first activist artwork” as it is “[b]ased on subversion on the one hand, and empowerment on the other […]” (341).

6 Similarly, in drawing on David Rushkoff’s concept of the media virus, Billionaires’ founding member Andrew Boyd elaborates on the activists’ conscious utilization of mass media mechanisms: “The Billionaires’ virus was virulent, because it was a carrier on the mega-virus of the Presidential campaign itself. It was designed to appeal to the media: it was timely, visual, funny, and accessible … we introduced it into the media stream in a manner calculated to maximize its content.” (373)
Yet, it would be too narrow a perspective to consider the Billionaires’ activist parodies merely in terms of Eco’s “semiological guerilla warfare” (135). As I will elaborate in the following sections, the Billionaires do not only appropriate dominant modes of representation for their political parodies which they use to penetrate the mass media, but they also combine these representational attacks with an elaborate strategy of empowerment and a decentralized network of participation. Hence, the Billionaires’ creative parodies and activists’ spectacles are combined with well-organized grassroots political work. On their homepage, for example, you find a “Do it yourself manual.” This 50-page manual provides detailed instructions on how to participate in the network, how to organize local chapters and how to engineer the most efficient appearances in public space. In this way, the Billionaires’ campaign is also designed to be participatory. By 2004, 75 local Billionaires’ chapters existed across the country (Billionaires 4). The idea behind this is that whenever either Bush or his secretaries appear somewhere in public a

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7 The idea that political critique by means of cultural representation is an effective tool for social transformation has recently been challenged within different contexts. Martha Nussbaum’s well-known critique of Judith Butler’s idea of performative subversion of gender identity, for example, follows this line of argumentation. Nussbaum argues that Butler’s idea of female subversion “never destabilizes the larger system. She [Butler] doesn’t envisage mass movements of resistance or campaigns for political reform” (Nussbaum 7). According to Nussbaum, “In Butler, resistance […] involve[es] no unironic, organized public action for legal or institutional change” (Nussbaum, 10). Tying in with Nussbaum’s argument, one could read the Billionaires’ parodies of electoral campaigning as mere attacks on the regime of representation. Their appearances and fake media material might be entertaining to watch and might equally evoke a smile on the face of their audience but concerning a profound social critique, the Billionaires’ parodies lack any potential to actually have an effect on real political conditions. Pheng Cheah’s critique of Homi Bhabha’s idea of cultural mimicry also fits in this line of argumentation, because of its – in Cheah’s opinion too narrow – focus on “signification and cultural representation.” Emancipatory consciousness, Cheah argues, cannot subsist on cultural-symbolic flux alone but must also be “materially effective” (Cheah 168-169).

8 Here, it is interesting to note, that the campaign maintains its rhetoric of parody through and through.
Performance Meets Activism

small crowd of ‘the likes of them’ awaits them. The activists, of course, were to dress as rich entrepreneurs, businessmen or celebrities to symbolize who profits from Bush’s politics. In doing so, Billionaires for Bush also function as a kind of alter ego of Bush’s politics, following its representatives wherever they appear in public.

In this sense, the well-designed campaign of these activists is exceptional, because their hybrid forms of protest and parody simultaneously address two disparate audiences: while the internet appearances, the mock radio- and TV-ads as well as their well organized appearances in public space manage to penetrate the mass media, the fake-electoral campaign, the website with its blog, and campaign materials appeal to political activists who search for a platform in which they can actively participate (cf. Boyd 372).

Here, activism and performance begin to blur. Of course, theatrical means (such as banners, puppets and other props) are well suited as activists’ tools, because they help to arouse attention. But even more importantly, I would argue, it is another feature which connects theater and activism: theater constitutes a public space in which people come together to share an experience (both as actors and spectators) and perform what David Román called “a temporary and conditional we” (1). He elaborates: “Performance’s liveness and impermanence allow for a process of exchange – between artists and audiences, between past and present – where new social formations emerge” (1).

In this sense, the Billionaires’ activism is not only theatrical because it employs creative devices for political work, but also, because their campaigns share with other forms of performance the capability of both addressing and bringing together diverse groups of people, not only as a collection of individuals but also as citizens.

9 More explicitly, in her discussion of the American Aids activists collective ACT UP, Alicia Solomon stresses the advantages of using theater for activist purposes: “Good political protest has always been consciously theatrical. […] Activists have always counted on dramatic devices to get their causes noticed. But more than that, they have tapped into theatre’s special union of representation and community to symbolically demonstrate our personal stakes in political issues” (44).

However, with the 2008 election’s defeat of the Republicans, it seems not only likely but also necessary that the Billionaires’ alter their strategy. While musicians, actors and all sorts of celebrities join forces to support the two democratic candidates Hilary Clinton and Barack Obama, both the activists’ very name – Billionaires for Bush – and the modus operandi that they hitherto employed become somewhat obsolete.

Here, the interesting question is whether and if so how the activists will manage to transform both their network and their performances from being a mere parody, that is a gesture of critique directed against dominant politics, into a supportive tool or means of actually expressing support for political change (and hence for the Democrat’s candidates)? How will the Billionaires’ campaign adjust its place within such a new political constellation? And will they succeed in maintaining the entertaining, humorous character of their political activism?

As we could witness in the run up for the elections, public support for Democratic candidates increased immensely. Especially Barack Obama’s rhetoric of a “politics of change” was joyfully taken up by various artists and celebrities within popular culture. One prominent example is Senator Obama’s speech at the New Hampshire Primary (in January 2008) which was quickly transformed into a pop song called “Yes We Can”. Designed by Bob Dylan’s son Jesse, performed by pop singer Will.I.Am (Black Eyed Peas) with participation of well known celebrities such as Scarlett Johansson, Herbie Hancock and many more, the video clip’s minimalist aesthetics, the gentle, emotional melody and finally the juxtaposition of Obama’s and the artists’ performance evokes a powerful sentiment: Hence, when Obama claims in his New Hampshire speech: “we are not as divided as our politics suggest, […] we are one people, we are one nation” (Obama), the video clip, by letting Obama’s words be repeated and echoed by different people evokes just this image: America is one nation. In this sense, the clip depicts Obama’s conviction: “Yes we can (change this nation).” In addition to the sparse, hymn-like melody, the clip is shot in black and white and avoids any kind of visual or technical gadgetry. The song both echoes and accompanies Obama’s speech. In combination lyrics, melody as well
as the visual design offer a sentimental, reverential and devotional tribute to Barack Obama.

In contrast, the Billionaires also supported Obama, but with a strikingly different strategy. In fact – and at first sight rather irritatively – the Billionaires “responded” to this solemn appreciation of Obama with a parody of the clip. In maintaining the visual design as well as the melody of the song, of course, the Billionaires parody the artist’s homage to Obama. But taking a closer look, we see that it is not so much only the original video clip that is caricatured, but rather, the form and aesthetics of the clip are appropriated and used as carriers for another parody, namely that of the GOP: The original song worships Obama’s words as the various artists repeat his remarks and hence resemble a unified, powerful voice (of the nation) in support of Obama’s agenda. In contrast, the Billionaires’ clip resembles a parodic reply of mock conservatives who retort Obama’s vision of a pathway of change with a decisive “No you can’t” (fig 3):
We are not as divided as our portfolios suggest. We run this nation, and together we will stop this nonsense about writing the next great chapter in the American story with three words that will ring from coast to coast; from sea to shining sea -- No. You. Can’t.  (Billionaires for Bush “No You Can’t”)

This clip, I want to argue is a hybrid form which has different effects. As a parody of the original video clip, the Billionaires take away the solemn tone of the original. By parodying not only the original but also Obama’s opponents, the clip manages to express the activists’ support of Obama without abandoning their entertaining and humorous rhetoric. Thus the clip also juxtaposes two disparate voices: by not eliminating Obama’s appearance and speech as it is used in the original and by simultaneously parodying a fictional response to Obama’s vision, the Billionaires create a powerful cultural hybrid, which is both parody and homage - “a pajarge” (Ceglie quoted in Dwyer). In this way, the activists walked a tightrope of at once presenting their political agenda as humorous entertainment while at the same time also expressing straight-
forward support for Obama’s ‘politics of change.’ While the previous electoral campaign parodies of the Billionaires solely attacked Republican politics by exaggerating their rhetoric and carrying their statements to the extremes, this most recent video clip utilizes parody and appropriation as positive forces of support for the democratic candidate.

Disregarding this shift, one must say that in contrast to the previously mentioned more conventional form of protest by the Sierra Club activists, both the Billionaires’ 2004 and 2008 electoral campaigns represent a different form of political protest in public space. By using alternative rhetoric, organization and aesthetics, activist performance defies hegemonic political discourse both aesthetically and ideologically. It might be hoped, that now that Obama is elected President, the hymn-like melody of “No you Can’t” can also be read as a lament for the good old days, in which parody and satire were necessary means to comment on governmental politics.

Works Cited

Primary Sources


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Figures

Figure 1: Billionaires for Bush Official Logo. <http://www.billionairesforbush.com/logobig.jpg>.

Figure 2: Billionaires for Bush protesters. <http://www.billionairesforbush.com/photos.php>.

Figure 3: Will.I.Am “Yes we Can” and Billionaires for Bush “No You Can’t” Filmstills. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/16/nyregion/16about.html>.
Sam 2.0:
Appropriations, Interpretations and Adaptations of Beckett on YouTube

I. Introduction

1.1 Adapting Drama

The Call for Papers for this year's CDE conference rightfully diagnoses a neglect of theatre and drama in the field of adaptation studies. Even though Linda Hutcheon’s *Theory of Adaptation* reminds one that the adaptational process inheres to the genre of drama, because every staging of a drama text may be considered an adaptation in performance (39), she does not say much else on drama adaptation for the rest of her book. A glance at the bulk of studies on adapting literature reveals a comparable absence of the issue. Robert Stam’s and Alessandra Raengo’s *Literature and Film*, for example, makes us aware that innovations in film technology have inaugurated a post-celluloid era. Hence enquiries into film adaptations also must take cognisance of the new media. This extension on the film side, however, meets with a rather limited conception of literature, for the case studies in the collection exclusively deal with film adaptations of novels or stories. Similarly, drama adaptation is almost absent from Thomas Leitch’s recent *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents* – with the one notable exception of William Shakespeare, who seems to be virtually the only dramatist adaptation studies have so
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far bothered about. In general, critics appear to skirt the investigation of drama adaptations, concentrating instead on adaptations of novels or other narrative texts into diverse (audio-)visual media, such as film, television or, more recently, into digital art forms such as computer games or virtual art. This bias may either account for or be caused by the two key issues that surface most prominently in adaptation studies:

First, as far as the relationship between original and adaptation is concerned, adaptation theory has come to jettison fidelity as a main criterion to evaluate adaptations in order to embrace postmodern and poststructuralist notions of intertextuality or intermediality. The former focus on fidelity can also explain the conspicuousness of Shakespeare in adaptation studies. Studies on Shakespeare adaptations usually enquire into the transformation of ‘the Bard’ as an epitome of canonical authorship rather than into generic problems of adapting a drama text. In other words: ‘adapting Shakespeare’ in the first place means to respond to an authoritative original, and not grappling with genre questions.

Second, adaptation studies display a special concern for questions of narrativity and the transposition of narrative elements in transgeneric processes (see the two articles by Nünning and Sommer). While this interest comes almost naturally when investigating adaptations of novels into films, the impact of narratology on adaptation studies also surfaces in more general terms, as for example in Marie Ryan’s studies on narrative in digital media or in Linda Hutcheon’s distinction between three different forms of adaptation according to “modes of engagement” (35), which look at adaptation processes between telling and showing, showing and showing, and interacting and telling/showing (see Hutcheon, Chapter 2).

By equating dramatic texts with the telling mode, Hutcheon’s taxonomy includes drama adaptations in the first category and concurs with

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1 Since a media shift is usually implied in the adaptation process, the latter term is preferred in this essay.

2 As an example one can refer to Leitch (100-103 and 120-126), whose discussion of Shakespeare movies, especially Luhrmann’s Romeo and Juliet, focuses on allusions to contents and degrees of faithfulness, and not on generic problems.
recent attempts to apply narratology to drama (cf. Richardson, Nünning and Sommer, Jahn). Still, drama must be seen as a special case, as Monika Fludernik reminds us: “The distinctness of drama in any discussion makes it a moot point in this context; even if narratologists lay claim to drama as a narrative genre, drama will always be clearly defined on account of its dialogue form and performative and visual nature” (“Genres” 286). Fludernik’s awareness of the distinct qualities of drama hints at the important relationship between drama and theatre. There is no place here to enlarge on the relationship of these two genres; suffice it to say that it is necessary to distinguish drama text and theatre performance (see Poschmann) in view of the fact that the staging of a drama text is always also an adaptation in performance. Manfred Jahn’s classification of text types is useful in this context. He suggests distinguishing between media realisations instead of representational modes and accordingly differentiates between written texts (including drama, which is referred to as “script”) and performance (such as theatre or film) (Jahn 675; see also Nünning and Sommer, Drama 120).

1.2 Adapting Beckett

Such a distinction is also most adequate when discussing the adaptation of plays by Samuel Beckett, which consistently reflect on and probe into the possibilities and limits of their media realisation, into YouTube clips – a rather new form of media realisation which does not surface in Hutcheon’s Theory. The present article is a first venture into exploring adaptations from a so far widely neglected genre into a so far not yet fully explored one. Our chief concern lies with the attempt to reconsider some general tenets of adaptation theory in view of their applicability or validity to drama on the one hand and the popular form of the YouTube clip on the other. Samuel Beckett’s plays are an ideal test case

3 With her insistence on the performative aspects of drama, which is further emphasised in her article on “Narrative and Drama,” Fludernik incorporates elements of theatre into her characterization of drama.

4 In fact, one may ask in how far the clips on YouTube actually do constitute a genre of their own.
in this respect because they engage so consistently and thoroughly in a
dialogue with different media forms, testing the limits of representation
and perception and influencing, in turn, the development of other
media. Peter Seiber therefore calls Beckett a “Medienkünstler” (media
artist), a veritable paradigm of a multi-media author, who not only
provided the media with material but who also produced in and with the
media, reflecting on his productions as well as on media history (Seiber
10). Before embarking on our examples, however, a few words need to
be said on the two major traditional concerns of adaptation studies –
fidelity and narrativity:

As far as the question of fidelity is concerned, choosing Samuel
Beckett as a test case may betray an imp of perversity, given Beckett’s
own hostility to adaptations of his texts (he outrightly forbid film
adaptations of his plays; cf. Lommel 42). Beckett’s obsession to control
minutely the staging of his plays would render him a paragon of fidelity,
and one could regard the Beckett Estate, supervising the maintenance of
fidelity after Beckett’s death, as the guardian angel of this concern.5 In
view of the fact that the respectful Beckett on Film project was con-
fronted with the rule “‘No cuts, no gender-bending, and if Beckett says
‘beach’ there should be a beach. We didn’t want adaptations or ‘inspired
by’ stuff’”,6 one may wonder how the abundance of totally unauthorized
adaptations of Beckett on YouTube have so far been able to flourish
without greater impediments. Adaptations of Beckett’s plays, especially
in such a popular medium, therefore raise in particular the question of
authorship and authority, as well as the issue of the relationship between
author and recipient. Moreover, authorship is a precarious issue on the

5 In a recent article on the mise-en-scène of Beckett in ‘illegitimate’ new media
contexts such as television and youtube as well as in academia, Eckart Voigts-
Virchow (203-210) has elaborated on this peculiarity, including examples of the
various lawsuits that have ensued from Beckett’s almost autocratic wish for fidelity.

6 So Michael Colgan, the artistic director of Dublin’s Gate Theatre and one of
the initiators of the “Beckett on Film” project in an interview with Alan Riding. The
interview originally appeared in the New York Times on 11 June 2000 and is available
online at <http://www.beckettonfilm.com/colgan_interview.html>. Michael
Lommmel gives a brief overview of the project in chapter 2.3 of his monograph
Samuel Beckett: Synästhesie als Medienspiel.
YouTube platform as well, because the user who posts a clip need not necessarily be its author. The chain between author, text and reader, that is characteristic of literary communication, is replaced on YouTube by a network established by the multifarious links between users and presented products as it were.

With regard to narrativity, the peculiar role of narrative elements in Beckett's plays renders the dramatic art of the Irish writer an intriguing case. Quite paradoxically, one could suggest that Beckett’s plays are non-narrative if one applies a broad understanding of narrative, which is merely defined through the temporal sequence of actions and events arranged in a storyline. Yet they do contain narrative elements according to a more narrow definition that regards the mediated process of narration as constitutive.

Words, for example, are appreciated as formal elements in Beckett's plays, as shapes of sound rather than as means of expression or communication. The critical stance of Beckett’s dramatic art towards language and the reliance on visual or acoustic elements of expression marks the very theatricality of Beckett’s plays. If Robert Stam perceives in iconophobia, logophilia and anti-corporeality some of the sources of critics' hostility towards film in general and film adaptations of literature in particular, Beckett’s plays can be considered to exhibit just the opposite by their emphasis on the significance of images, even when dealing with verbal art. “I am interested in the shape of ideas […] That sentence has a wonderful shape. It is the shape that matters,” Beckett reportedly said. The interest in shapes, surfaces and forms makes Beckett’s plays particularly prone for adaptations that emphasise and enhance these

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7 Such a plot-oriented definition is proposed and deployed, for instance, in Monika Fludernik’s “Narrative and Drama.”

8 Hence, Fludernik uses Beckett’s plays Not I, Krapp’s Last Tape and A Piece of Monologue as examples of a dramatic art invoking a fictional world (“Narrative and Drama” 360-361).

And resulting from this interest in the shape of ideas, in the sheer surface form of image and sound, the representational mode of Beckett’s plays is often closer to showing than to telling. Adaptations of Beckett’s plays therefore cannot be as easily classified in terms of a shift from telling to showing as Hutcheon so generally suggests for drama adaptations. One needs to reconsider and possibly expand Hutcheon’s categories in order to find something more adequate.

On the other hand, although most of Beckett’s plays ostentatiously refuse to develop something like a story, they do include narrator figures. In the later plays, these narrator figures in fact seem to take over and thus offer a reflection on the mode of narration itself. 11 Beckett’s plays are hence not non-narrative; they may be plotless, 12 but they do insist on the voice and/or the spectacle of a narrator who tells and mediates and thus constructs himself. The recipient, in turn, almost sees himself confronted with a coercion to interpret this situation, to supply the missing links in order to establish a story supplement to this spectacle. 13 We shall argue that this self-mediation concurs with the function visual aspects. 10

10 This potential exists notwithstanding Beckett’s minimalism, which also affects his visual expression. After all, the theatricality of Beckett’s plays is no matter of excess. In his article on Film, Raymond Federman thus contends that “It is by returning to the most basic forms of expression, to the primary sources of any artistic medium [...], Beckett seems to suggest, that art can be renewed” (365).

11 Matthijs Engelberts contends: “[D]ans un théâtre où ne figure plus qu’un seul personnage-narrateur, c’est celui-ci même qui retient l’attention […]; l’action est en grande partie médiatisée par ce moi scénique, narrateur projeté sur le devant de la scène où il figure souvent seul. Il s’agit en outre d’un narrateur qui se raconte lui-même, se médiatisé lui-même; or, le moi racontant et le moi raconté [… ] entretiennent chez Beckett une relation très difficile: décalage entre le personnage racontant, médiatisant, et le personnage raconté, médiatisé” (7-8). [“In a play featuring only one single narrator-figure, it is this figure that draws attention […]; the plot is to a great extent mediated by this scenic self, a narrator projected onto the scene where s/he frequently figures alone; in Beckett, the narrating self and the narrated self […] enter a very difficult relationship, involving a gap between the narrating, mediating persona and the narrated, mediated one”; my translation A.M.]

12 Richardson calls them “texts without stories” (321).

13 In this context, Paul Heinemann speaks of an “Interpretationszwang” (a coercion to interpret) of the reader confronted with Beckett’s plays. Heinemann believes
of clips on YouTube – which may eventually turn out to be an ideal medium for Beckett plays to adapt and multiply.

2. Beckett on YouTube

On the basis of this theoretical groundwork let us now consider two examples from the vast archive of clips inspired by Beckett and his literary and dramatic oeuvre. With these, we aim to show how users on YouTube are creatively partaking in interpretative reconsiderations of Beckett’s plays as well as giving testimony to their own technical skills and skills of performing themselves to the global audiences of a platform such as YouTube.

Before doing so, however, it is necessary to have a closer look at YouTube itself and to Beckett’s role for the YouTube community. As has already been outlined, YouTube is only one of many video sharing sites on the World Wide Web. Since its inception in early 2005, however, YouTube has become the most popular site of its kind on the web. 50,000 videos were being added per day in May 2006, and this increased to 65,000 by July. 14 In January 2008 alone, nearly 79 million users watched over 3 billion videos on YouTube. 15 The site’s fast growth and popularity, together with its market potential, prompted internet giant Google to buy the site for 1.65 billion dollars in November 2006, 16 setting a new record in the valuation for user-generated media sites. In contrast, StudiVZ.net, the popular social networking site for students in Europe (which is allegedly an adaptation of its American predecessor

that Beckett’s works irritate readers and audiences because they draw attention to their recipients’ desire for consistence and illusion while simultaneously defying any attempt at finding a definite meaning. This, of course, is owed to the fact that the meaning of these highly self-reflexive texts lies precisely in the constant deferral of the same (see Heinemann 383).

14 Cf. “YouTube serves up 100 million videos a day online.” USA Today Online. Online article. version: 9 September 2008.


Facebook) was sold for an undisclosed sum of somewhere between 20 to 100 million Euros in 2007. The site features a large variety of different videos, from music video clips filmed off of television screens or amateur videos featuring their protagonists in all different kinds of activities to experimental films produced especially for YouTube. The site has also attracted users to post videos allegedly inspired by or based on the works of a number of acclaimed writers, artists or philosophers. A search for “Samuel Beckett” on YouTube currently yields a result of roughly 440 different videos. Additional hits result if one searches for the titles of Beckett’s plays individually. If you exclude clips of Beckett’s own *Film*, or the “Beckett on Film” project, and furthermore neglect clips of productions of Beckett’s plays and clips where Samuel Beckett may appear as a key word in the description of the clip but where the clip itself hardly can be granted Beckett-inspired value, we have identified 78 clips that remain. To give you an example of clips of rather dubious indebtedness to Beckett, let us briefly mention one that shows nothing but a green coloured screen for about one minute and which is, according to the user “novavideono,” a snippet from a new film adaptation of *Waiting for Godot* by one Nigel Tomm with the same user also having posted a video of a magenta coloured screen that is credited as an outtake of another Nigel Tomm adaptation of Dostoevsky’s novel *The Brothers Karamazov*. Both videos are linked to Amazon.com entries for Nigel Tomm’s films. The films are both about 75 minutes long and show themselves nothing but a green or magenta screen for the entire time of their duration.

A similar search for the self-proclaimed Beckett fan Harold Pinter only brings up 159 videos in total (most of which are recordings of Pinter’s plays or interviews with the man himself). Granted, most canonical authors and their work, not only from the English language canon, also feature on YouTube in various forms (maybe a sign of hope for those who fear that the engagement with traditional forms of literature is fading in light of new technological advances of our time). A search for “William Shakespeare,” for example, results in approximately 1,930 hits with about 165 cases of adaptation (most of which are clips from professional cinematic adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays or readings of his sonnets). “Oscar Wilde” has around 700 hits, again with
the majority being recordings of professional films or television programmes on the author and his writings.

In contrast to most clips related to, inspired by or talking about other authors and their oeuvre, however, there appears to be a different kind of quality in the engagement with the works of Beckett on YouTube. This may be owed to a particular appeal of Beckett and his works to contemporary young audiences but it is also clearly indebted to the strong medial potency of Beckett’s plays as has already been pointed out.

2.1 Waiting for Godot – The Barbie Edition

In the following section, we would like to discuss two examples of adaptations of Beckett’s play Waiting for Godot that strike us as particularly interesting. Our first example is a rendering of the play set on a kitchen table and using Barbie dolls (or more correctly, dolls of the Barbie series from Mattel). The clip was allegedly created by a Belgian user by the name of “karelkenvijf” together with some friends (whose nicknames we are given at the beginning of the clip). The clip lasts for a little more than six minutes, thereby giving us a very condensed version of the original play. What is probably most striking in the clip is how the ‘authors’ playfully engage with Beckett’s notion of an all male cast. Vladimir and Estragon are embodied by seemingly androgynous dolls. Despite the doll’s recognisably male bodies, the combination of their attire coupled with the fact that their voices are given by two females results in a large affair of gender bending in the performance. Lucky and Pozzo also, through their costumes as well as their way of acting and particularly the rendering of Lucky’s “Think” speech in a falsetto voice, strongly blur perceived notions of masculinity and femininity.

18 As could be expected, Waiting for Godot is the most popular of Beckett’s plays that feature on YouTube (a search for “Waiting for Godot” alone yields a result of 194 entries).
Barbie/Mattel dolls together with the selection of music and props for the performance also function as cultural markers situating the play within the world of a global market economy and a global culture. Viewers will certainly notice Lucky’s rendering of Michael Jackson’s moonwalk and the subsequent break-dance scene, or the infamous artificial IKEA plants that take the place of the tree in Beckett’s play. Dislocating the play from the original “country road” to a kitchen table (maybe also straight out of the Swedish furniture giant?) also provides a setting that may be more familiar to the contemporary city dweller than Beckett’s original location as deserted country roads have become somewhat of a rarity.

The clip also freely mixes genre conventions, a technique that is highly characteristic of amateur video clips on platforms such as YouTube. It interconnects the theatrical rendering of a play with elements of the music video clip, the animation film and the cartoon, as can be seen in the snapshot from the clip below.

Filmed with an unsteady handheld camera that rather clumsily switches between characters and scenes, the clip clearly betrays no ambition to be perceived as a professional video. Rather, it humorously betrays its awareness of its own medial character with the amateurish paper version of a professional clapperboard, announcing what is going to be shot. At the beginning of the clip, for example, the clapperboard

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19 The clip employs a large variety of popular music pieces and songs such as Quincy Jones’s “Soul Bossanova” of recent Austin Powers fame, “Walk this Way,” the collaborative effort of Run DMC and Aerosmith, or C&C Music Factory’s “Gonna Make You Sweat (Everybody dance now!).”
girl even hesitates for a second in her announcement of “Waiting for Godot. Act One”.

What makes this clip stand out among the many existing takes on *Waiting for Godot* on YouTube, apart from its creative engagement with Beckett’s play and the various ways it undermines the original staging regulations laid down in the secondary text, is that it is able to retain and even increase the comic elements and the fun that, according to Beckett himself, must always also be part of the performative rendering of the dire and hopeless condition of man (and woman). After all, “nothing is funnier than unhappiness” (Beckett 101) as Nell in *Endgame* reminds us!

2.2 Godot – Grayson Villanueva

The second clip supposedly was produced for a high school literature class. Filmed with a steady cam inside what appears to be a classroom, it shows a young Asian American student named Grayson Villanueva performing a song he has written himself which he says is “about Godot.” The whiteboard that provides the backdrop to the performance, shows, apart from various notes on the left and the right, a rough rendering of a tree. The performance starts with the explanatory words of its protagonist saying: “This song is about Godot, told from the perspective of someone who’s read the book and is now stuck in the plot.” The song does not directly quote the play itself, apart from introductory stage directions such as “A country road. A tree. Evening.” With rocky guitar riffs and lyrics inspired by the play, this performance apparently spoke to a large audience on YouTube. In strange contrast to the first example, which, in spite of its artistic quality, has received no feedback so far, and although viewing statistics are similar for both (ranging at around 300), this second video has prompted a number of


21 In contrast to that, a famous clip showing Beckett and Joyce playing golf, has been viewed more than 50,000 times, and videos of Barack Obama currently rate at around 500,000 to over 7 million (“Pitch ‘n’ Putt with Beckett ‘n’ Joyce” 2001, dir. Donald Clarke, Blue Light/ Bórd Scannán na hÉireann).
interesting responses from viewers. Comments range from one person saying that he or she has also already sat on the same desk as our performer, celebrating his or her local knowledge of the place the video was filmed in, to one comment that reads like this:

“Just a thought, I’m directing and producing a public service announcement for the San Diego area. It is going to have many models and talents featured into the service and I am wondering if you are up for writing a song about suicide.”

More than pointing out that YouTube, like similar platforms, such as MyVideo.de, has already made a number of young people more or less famous (such as the Turkish German singer Mina, who currently also features in a television ad for MyVideo.de), this comment is also interesting in that it makes a direct reference from the musical performance of “Godot” to the issue of “suicide.” Whether or not the person who made the comment knows about the fact that the failure to commit suicide is one of the central problems faced by Vladimir and Estragon in the original play remains open to speculation.

3. Conclusion

What can be inferred from these examples of (Beckett) adaptations on YouTube? As mentioned above, Linda Hutcheon’s recent *Theory of Adaptation* entirely omits the bulk of adapted material on YouTube, confining her treatment of “interactive” media only to computer games, virtual reality and theme park rides. True enough, YouTube clips are not interactive in the sense that a user can actually interfere with the clip itself. Interaction is restricted to pausing, fast-forwarding or rewinding the clip, to giving comments, to ranking and to adding the clip to playlists. Nor do the clips display an immersive aesthetics that is comparable to film. This is largely due to the clips’ format, the often poor quality of the pictures, the surrounding interface, with its many, simultaneously displayed options for interacting, all of them impeding the creation of immersive or illusionary effects. Although the interface...

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23 A recently added function allows to post so called video responses, which may enhance the interactive potential of the site.
now includes an option for full screen viewing, the function of the YouTube clip still vastly differs from that of film, and this also has consequences for adaptations on YouTube. Even if YouTube users post film extracts or projects they had submitted in film workshops or at school, the clips assume a different quality and function once they appear on the website. Our examples show that placing a clip on YouTube aims at initiating a communication with other users as well as at (re-)presenting oneself in the World Wide Web. Adaptations of Beckett on YouTube are creative and interpretive transpositions, or “extended intertextual engagement[s]” with Beckett’s works,24 but this is not their sole function. Posting an adaptation of Beckett on YouTube is primarily intended to say something about the user’s relation to and interaction with Beckett (certain predilections for reading, possible interpretations etc.), as well as about his/her skills in handling computer software, perhaps even about his/her artistic ambition – presenting oneself as a fellow artist of Beckett, so to speak. This function can be compared to Stephan Porombka’s characterisation of so-called “poetry clips,” that is, short videos of poetry readings, where the poet is asked to address the prospective viewer directly. Porombka argues that this type of performance25 shifts the focus away from the text – what is being said – to the self-performance of the author. A similar self-awareness and self-reflexivity can be discerned in the YouTube clips, as the producers of clips enter into communication by creating the illusion that they offer an insight into their own literary or artistic predilections, or into their own creations. If one follows Manfred Jahn’s classification of text types, YouTube clips are therefore performative, like stage performances, but the performance in question is a self-performance of the author rather than the performance of an adapted/staged text. Considering the particular function of YouTube clips, however, I would rather propose to apply the three-level distinc-

24 Thus complying with Hutcheon’s definition of adaptation.

25 The aesthetics of these poetry clips is indebted to slam poetics, a popular attempt to overcome the aloofness of the poetic genre in general and conventional poetry readings in particular, where the performance of the poet’s self and the produced effect frequently appear to be more important than the presented text.
tion of text types that is suggested in Monika Fludernik’s article “Gen-
res, Text Types, or Discourse Modes?”, which distinguishes between
five different “macro-genres” with respective genres/text types and
discourse modes. Whereas novel, film and drama are each classified as
belonging to the “narrative” macro-genre, the YouTube clip, with its
communicational function, can be classified as a genre/type within the
“conversational” macro-genre, which includes letters, discussions or
conversational exchange. Adapting a drama into a YouTube clip would
thus involve a more considerable generic change than producing a film
version.26

As far as the relationship of author and recipient is concerned, You-
Tube is one of the eminent examples that shows how Web 2.0 has
increasingly offered access to content that has been produced by non-
professional users (cf. Manovich). In fact, using the present perfect
tense is somewhat inadequate in this context, for platforms such as
YouTube, Wikipedia etc. gradually blur the boundaries of the positions
of producer/author, object and recipient. If Linda Hutcheon rightly
dissolves the fixed object character of adaptation in general, defining it
as both product and process, a comparable dissolution occurs with
respect to the positions of author and user – or producer and recipient –
on YouTube or similar platforms. The user is invited to become a
producer him/herself, to share in the creative production or in the
development of the site by ranking, rating, commenting, communicating
clips to others via mail, or by creating and adding his/her own clips.27 In

26 Whereas Fludernik does not incorporate theatre performance in this model,
her essay of 2008 proposes to “privilege performance” in narratological analyses of
drama (378). In view of a desirable narratology of drama she rightfully concludes
that “such an enterprise would only make sense […] if it allowed itself to be
integrated within a general model of narratological levels and instances (narrator,
narrate, etc.) embracing all the various media. The narratological analysis of film,
plays, cartoons and novels would need to share a basic model, even if each medium
requires some optional or additional features to make it work” (ibid.). Including new
genres such as YouTube clips, with their peculiar features, hints at the complexity of
such an endeavour.

27 Although Manovich states that “according to 2007 statistics, only between
0.5% and 1.5% users of most popular social sites (Flickr, YouTube, Wikipedia)
view of this phenomenon, Axel Bruns suggests the term PRODUSERs for those hybrid participants who engage in such user-led production.\textsuperscript{28}

Being part of such a dynamic network of continuous production and reconstruction, YouTube clips can be regarded as potential, perhaps even as the definitive examples of adaptation per se, weaving a web of derived material, inviting us to ponder genre-related issues (e.g. in how far is the narrative aspect relevant in a medium that primarily emphasises self-reflection), and urging us to rethink questions of authorship or reception.

Last but not least, it is important to consider the purpose and cultural function of these internet clips. Geared to instigate communication, the clips on YouTube aim at the production of an effect. Their chief purpose is to entertain and to gain popularity, which will subsequently be expressed in access rates and rankings.\textsuperscript{29} Unlike film, YouTube clips aim at the surface of things, at the general cultural iconicity of adapted texts or authors, for instance, and they explore how these can be adapted. Surfaces, form, shapes, and a self-reflexive engagement with surfaces, forms and shapes are most important for the communicative and cultural functions of clips on YouTube – and this concern with surfaces, forms, and shapes may explain why Beckett’s works, especially his plays, come to surface with such great popularity on this Website.

contributed their own content,” the possibility to interact is accessible, and the “number of new videos uploaded to YouTube every 24 hours (as of July 2306) [is] 65,000”.

\textsuperscript{28} Bruns defines the concept of produsage as follows: “it highlights that within the communities which engage in the collaborative creation and extension of information and knowledge […] the role of ‘consumer’ and even that of ‘end user’ have long disappeared, and the distinctions between producers and users of content have faded into comparative insignificance. In many of the spaces we encounter here, users are always already necessarily also producers of the shared knowledge base, regardless of whether they are aware of this role – they have become a new, hybrid produser” (2).

\textsuperscript{29} An investigation of commentaries on the clips certainly may be a worthwhile topic for reception studies, because it would yield hints at whether the audience responds to content, form, self-performance or other elements. Unfortunately, such a far-reaching project exceeds the limits of the present article.
Anja Müller and Mark Schreiber

Works Cited

Primary Literature

Secondary Literature
Beckett on YouTube


IV. ADAPTING HISTORY
"I am, and am not; freeze, and yet burn;
Since from myself my other self I turn."

(Gloriana, act III, scene 1, no.3
'The Queen’s Dilemma')

This paper is at first a paper on opera as adaptation, using the case study of Benjamin Britten’s 1953 opera Gloriana, adapted for television from a stage production. In doing so, it raises issues in adaptation studies at a time where this field of research is expanding, and moving into greater independence from its ‘mother’ disciplines, particularly English Literature and Film Studies. The establishment of two academic journals in the UK alone in 2007/2008 and the impact of Linda Hutcheon’s study A Theory of Adaptation (2006) contribute to the growing notion that adaptation must not just be seen in a comparative context, and the flawed taxonomies of “faithfulness” (sometimes flippantly termed “the F-word” by frustrated scholars), “true to the author’s intentions” and in the case of historical or biographical material, “real”, are kept alive by the public and the popular press, but not as parameters for academic analysis. Many other contributors to these proceedings will also reference these developments.

Since opera has thrived from its beginnings as a collocation of otherwise distinct art forms, it seems only appropriate that diverse intellectual
disciplines join each other to promote its understanding (Lindenberger 10).

Opera has an interesting position when looked at through the angle of adaptation studies. It is a genre that only comes into existence through adaptation, often in at least two steps: the libretto is adapted from a literary source, and then the composition triangulates both libretto and source in its process of adaptation. The libretto can often mediate between source and musical response. The process is mediatised further through the directorial and scenographic encodings as part of the production process – often adapted to contexts contemporary to the production rather than the creation of the opera. Apart from existing through and originating in adaptation, opera has evolved through cultural demands and has responded to trends through formal and stylistic development (use of recitatives, dialogue) and through its production history.

Opera studies is mostly approached through musicological interpretation, but also by theatre and production or visual historians and experts on the sources that inform libretti. It is felt that production-based research in opera studies could profit from an approach that analyses in parallel its musical / textual / intertextual / contextual / visual and other semiotic levels of expression (add cultural / gender / political / biographical, narrative studies as appropriate). Linda Hutchison recognises this in her 2006 study, showing ways of interpreting opera as adaptation, but also approaching it as a multi-layered artefact. Despite opera being an adaptation from the outset, the false taxonomies of faithfulness do not normally involve the librettist's adaptation of the (now often obscure) source, nor the way in which the composer has adapted the librettist's words to music. The audience's expectations of faithfulness often focus on the production and its concept. If these expectations are disappointed, the notion of “not being true to the composer's intentions” often comes into play, the composer seen as the main begetter, or auteur, of the opera. The “intentions” of Mozart or Verdi are not knowable when applied to a production in the 21st century, although works were adapted for a purpose or a commission in their
time. However, the term “intention” is often used to make one’s own frustrated expectations more authoritative.¹ Why do viewers feel they have to legitimise a reaction based on their preferences by referencing the intentions of the original author? Hutcheon suggests that the rigid exclusion of authorial context, mainly attributed to the poststructuralist school of thought, can deprive us of important information in the interpretation of adaptations, and indeed any work: “[…] if we cannot talk about the creative process, we cannot fully understand the urge to adapt and therefore perhaps the very process of adaptation. We need to know ‘why’” (Hutcheon 107). There is a difference, however, between acknowledging information in order to see a work in its own context, and the insistence that this context take preference every time the work is staged. Taking the declared (not the alleged) purposes or intentions of the adapter into account is not necessarily an act of intentional fallacy, also for the reason that it is more process- than product-related, and that contemporary context, commercial influences and stylistic decisions can all be looked at in an integrative way. This is not the same thing as extracting authorial intention from the finished product.

This paper discusses two adaptation processes: the transfer of historical and literary material for the creation of the opera Gloriana in 1953; and the transfer of content as well as form in a stage-to-screen adaptation process in 2000. The adaptation of historical material is introduced using the angle of “agency”, focusing in turn on Lytton Strachey (Elizabeth and Essex), Benjamin Britten and William Plomer (Gloriana) and Phyllida Lloyd (Gloriana for stage and television). “Agency” here needs to be distinguished from a comparative approach, or from a mere documentation of a source and its various adaptations. Elizabeth I and the Earl of Essex are historical characters, which means that there are many sources to consider. Even with Strachey’s work as the primary one, this might contribute to an approach that is open to contextual considerations. The most helpful question in order to summarise this approach seems to be “what’s it for?” This is a perpetual question of anyone engaged in dramaturgical practice, and central to the

¹ See also McKechnie, “Demon Dwarves” 102.
concept, the process, the realisation and the reception of adaptation. It serves both as an affirmation of Hutcheon’s foregrounding of the adaptational process and as a useful angle when addressing the different layers and agencies of the adaptation process relating to Gloriana. “What’s it for?” can be a question about personal, artistic or commercial reasons to adapt without getting caught up in an intentional fallacy. There are many examples: calling a film William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet (Luhrman 1996) seems to signal that the makers wish to acknowledge the texts’ literary ancestry. Consequently, many people argue that the filmmakers have a “duty of care” if they foreground the literary. The makers, however, want to target a literary audience that would be drawn by Shakespeare’s or Shelley’s name as well as an audience that would associate its interest with the auteur director, i.e. Luhrman. When German director Walter Felsenstein directed a film version of Beethoven’s 1805/1806 Opera Fidelio in 1956, it was obvious from his concept that this was to be a reckoning with the Nazi regime.2 The adaptation thus utilised a work and technology not available in its own period to make a specific point at a specific moment in history 150 years after the work was first staged. These two examples stress that literary ancestry is just one aspect of analysis that in these cases can sit alongside auteurism, a specific political agenda and selling film as an adaptation (Hutcheon 6).

Gloriana: 1953

The lack of an English ‘national opera’ in modern times had been an ongoing discussion in the group surrounding Britten in the early 1950s (see also Holroyd in John 75). At the instigation of the Earl of Harewood, Britten was commissioned for an opera to celebrate the corona-

2 “Zusammen mit Hanns Eisler erstellte Felsenstein, der den Fidelio für bühnen-
nuntauglich hielt, eine Bearbeitung, die Umstellungen und Kürzungen mit ein-

schloss, aber vor allem massiv in die Texte eingriff. Besonders die Sprechpassagen

wurden stark verändert. Trotz des historischen Ambientes wirkt diese Verfilmung

als eine fulminante Abrechnung mit dem Naziregime” (Mosebach).
read. William Plomer, who had been working on two children’s opera projects with Britten, was approached to write the libretto. He forged a close collaborative relationship with Britten that was later going to lead to work on the three church parables in the 1960s. Strachey’s *Elizabeth and Essex* was seen as a suitable source due to its dramatic qualities. Queen Elizabeth I had been the protagonist of many films by this time and remains a popular subject in our time – her appearances invariably have a significant connection with the state of the nation at particular historical moments – compare, for example, her portrayal in the films *Fire Over England* (William K Howard, 1937), *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1992) and *Elizabeth* (Shekhar Kapur, 1998). Her appearances on stage have been comparatively rare, and her choice as a subject for opera to celebrate the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953 did not turn out to be a fortuitous one for its first performance. The fact that it did not fulfil expectations is, however, no reflection on the actual work, but on its context and the expectations that came with it. *Gloriana*’s quality is confirmed by other revivals (notably the long-running Sadler’s Wells/later ENO production in 1966), and particularly came to the fore through a changed context in the 1990s, when history seemed to have “caught up” with the plot of the opera. The question “what’s it for?” is thus particularly pertinent in the case of Benjamin Britten and William Plomer’s collaboration on *Gloriana*. There would have been a certain level of expectation of historical conventions associated with works to celebrate state occasions, or the reigns of monarchs – Queen Elizabeth I was an avid supporter and sometime participant in court masques dedicated to her in the second half of the 16th century. Even in 1953,

3 For a detailed discussion on Britten and Plomer’s working process on *Gloriana*, see Alexander.

4 “[…] the filmic depiction of the monarch always depended on the contemporary situation. […] The significance of the monarchy as a symbol of a unified nation had waned and had been replaced by a kind of royal soap opera. The public’s increasing appetite for gossip and insight into the royal family’s private life seemed to revive the genre of royal bio-pics” (McKechnie, “Taking Liberties” 221).

5 Apart from the monarch glorifying Renaissance masques and operas, Schiller’s *Maria Stuart* (1800), Alan Bennett’s *A Question of Attribution* (1987) are examples.
ingredients such as pageantry, flattery or display of heroic activity would have been expected, or, to say it less kindly, “an all-star Iolanthe” (Guthrie in John 69) or “a kind of superior Merrie England” (Pears in John 68). Strachey’s unorthodox, personalised take on history, and the use of an ageing world-weary monarch to celebrate a young Queen defied these traditional expectations. The fact that the opera was hardly being presented to an audience of connoisseurs will have contributed to Peter Pears’ impression that it felt “almost like performing to an empty house” (in John 67). Robin Holloway calls the gala performance “a mere social gaffe unconnected with artistic content,” although he calls the choice of topic a “tactlessness of presenting, on the threshold of the ‘new Elizabethean age’ this undisguised portrait of the ageing Elizabeth I caught between inner desire and outer duty” (40).

The concept of “agency” becomes clear in the evolution of the historical information to Strachey’s dramatic biography, an approach he admitted was very much entwined with his own love life at the time of writing, leading some critics to say that Strachey had turned Essex into “a romanticized version of himself” (Holroyd in John 77). Plomer, in an article that contextualises the libretto for Gloriana, strikes a pragmatic note in relation to Strachey’s book:

This is not the place to analyse the book’s deficiencies, real or alleged, but to assert that it tells skilfully a tense and dramatic story based upon historical persons and happenings. […] the theme of the opera may be stated as follows. Queen Elizabeth, a solitary and ageing Monarch, undiminished in majesty, power, statesmanship, and understanding, sees in an outstanding young nobleman a hope for both the future of her country and of herself. (5)

Hans Keller, in an article that coincides with the successful revival of Gloriana in 1966, dismisses notions of “tactlessness” and states that William Plomer’s “take” on Strachey’s material “is the characterization which the music gets across” (3).

Separating the work from the occasion, several critics have stated that in Gloriana, Britten and Plomer managed to combine pageantry and

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6 Pears performed the role of Essex; Joan Cross was Queen Elizabeth I. There is an insightful interview about the production of Gloriana with both singers in John (61).
display of monarchic leadership with psychological drama, cannily using the structure of festive events to mirror the conflicts between public and private interests of the Queen (see, for example, Orr in John 73). Musically, Britten had to make decisions about the approach to Gloriana’s period and its well-known sound. His realisation adapts Elizabethan style, using it in a dramaturgically expressive way – an example is the court scene in Act II, scene 3, with dances such as the Pavane, Galliard, Lavolta, Morris Dance, March and Coranto: “We see Britten as a commentator rather than a pasticheur […] viewing Elizabeth I from the vantage point of Elizabeth II.” When the Queen returns, looking grotesque in Lady Essex’ ill-fitting dress, “it prompts the tuba, in its fat and ugly upper register, to a parody of the Lavolta” (Palmer in John 93). Holloway remarks that other numbers, such as Essex’ two lute songs, are rooted in existing sources, but “none are simply decorative” (40).

Britten’s adaptation also projects his own layer of “concealed autobiography” (Holroyd in John 75) onto Strachey’s material and Plomer’s libretto. This is partly driven by the occasion, and partly by themes that resonate throughout Britten’s works: that of the outsider, that of responsibility and public duty. At the time of Gloriana, Britten had been offered the position of Musical Director of Covent Garden, for example, and was torn between the selfishness necessary to pursue his work as a composer, and the usefulness and public duty he believed an artist to have.

Freed from its original purpose, its context-specificity more a hindrance than a help in 1953, Gloriana started to be acknowledged as a boundary breaking work in subsequent years. When restaged by Opera North in the 1990s, it became a big success, triggering another adaptation, that to television (most British households would have been first in touch with this medium around the time of the 1953 coronation).

Gloriana: 1993

Phyllida Lloyd: We were the beneficiaries of a huge amount of pessimism about the piece. The piece had, sort of, ‘turkey’ stamped on it for a lot of people and was considered a wholly inappropriate piece to glorify a young Queen's accession ... but here we were, at the end of our century, with an ageing monarch, somehow with her whole dynasty collapsing around her, so this felt like a new
The renaissance of *Gloriana* in the early 1990s was facilitated by a number of factors: nearly forty years of distance from the negative (albeit narrow) reception of the first performance, Queen Elizabeth II’s own age, similar to Queen Elizabeth I in the opera, and the events of 1992, famously described by the Queen as her ‘annus horribilis.’ The fire at Windsor Castle and the separation of the Prince and the Princess of Wales, to name but two examples, were responsible for both a heightened interest in the Royal family and, in some cases, sympathy for the plight of the monarch and her obligation to ‘perform’ in public while obviously affected by family matters. Other factors included the poignancy of the ‘private versus public’ debate, with Royal reference, but also with application to the rising culture of celebrity- and biography- obsession in the UK. The casting of Dame Josephine Barstow as the Queen meant that the story of the ageing monarch could be interwoven with the story of a ‘star’ singer, in lots of ways at the pinnacle of her profession, but also offering possibilities to reflect on the ageing process from a personalised angle.

Opera North’s production of *Gloriana*, directed by Phyllida Lloyd and conducted by Paul Daniel, had its first night on 18 December 1993. The production was hugely successful and saw two revivals, in 1996 and in 1999. The scenography and direction found simple ways in which to convey the contrast between private and public – opening out the stage to include the audience by having someone looking over a wall into the auditorium, and the chorus responding to a scene on stage from the back of the dress circle, for example. The action of ‘watching’ was a constant feature. Two ‘galleries’ running around the playing space created another layer of commentary: The courtiers sat in the first gallery, closer to the stage and to the Queen, whereas her normal subjects lined the gallery at the back, an audience opposite the real audience in the Grand Theatre. The contrast between private and public

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7 All of Phyllida Lloyd’s quotations have been transcribed from interview material on the ‘Extras’ menu of the *Gloriana* DVD.

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was shown in simple ways, mainly by creating confined spaces (the Queen’s chamber, and other private meeting spaces for her and Essex) through lighting, but making clear that everything could be overheard, and that the stability of power depended on having ears and eyes everywhere.\textsuperscript{8}

\textbf{Gloriana for television: 2000}

In 1999, Phyllida Lloyd was commissioned by the BBC to adapt her own 1993 production of \textit{Gloriana}, which had been revived at Opera North in the same year.\textsuperscript{9} Three live performances were used to film the footage of the court and public scenes, whereas smaller scenes, and those that involved Opera North production staff, were set up back-stage at the Grand Theatre. The two scenes between the Queen and Essex, at the core of the opera and set in her private rooms, were filmed in the studio.\textsuperscript{10}

Opera, an art form that rests on adaptation, can be problematic to adapt to other media. One reason for this might be its dependence on liveness to create the heightened emotion that is needed for its non-naturalistic conventions. Film or television adaptations of opera have often struggled to create the world of an opera as effectively as it seems to happen on stage. Phyllida Lloyd points out that it can mean a “terrible shortfall of joy for the viewer” and a possible “dilution of the theatrical experience,” as viewers are deprived of their own edit and focus, the camera making these decisions for them. Many television versions submit to the rules of the stage productions and take a documentary approach, which can hover between the two media in a non-

\textsuperscript{8} The Queen quotes the motto, “Video et taceo” (I see and I am silent) in scene 2, no. 7, her first duet with Essex, and her famed cloak, covered in eyes and ears, is mentioned in act III (Plomer in John 1983:100 and 118). Queen Elizabeth wears a cloak adorned with eyes and ears in the ‘Rainbow Portrait,’ attributed to Marcus Gheeraerts, c. 1600.

\textsuperscript{9} Date of first broadcast: 24 April 2000.

\textsuperscript{10} I am very grateful to Jane Bonner, Company Manager, Opera North, for giving me some useful insight into the stage production of \textit{Gloriana} and showing me photographs from it.
committal, unsatisfying way. Apart from the challenge of finding a televisual way in which to convey Gloriana, significant editing also had to take place, due to the timing being set at 100 minutes by the BBC. Lloyd decided to concentrate on the arch of the encounters that directly concerned the relationship between Queen and the Earl of Essex.11

The context in which to stage an opera about a monarch had already been poignant in the early 1990s, but was expanded significantly through the death of Princess Diana in 1997, and the perceived distance and coldness of the Royal Family in their failure to display their grief publicly.12 Gloriana in Lloyd’s interpretation offers a take on this situation by creating parallels between the role of a leading singer, supported by a cavalcade on- and backstage – the most important, but also most the isolated figure. The television adaptation gave Lloyd the opportunity to expand the onstage – backstage dichotomy she had created in the stage version by setting certain scenes in the offstage area, and by involving Opera North staff normally invisible to an audience. Consequently, the production deliberately blurs the boundaries between characters, their singers and their dramatic and practical function. When the curtain falls after the pageantry of act I scene 1, the Queen needs a fast change backstage. This is performed by the chorus, in character as her ladies-in-waiting, but production staff (stage managers, prop masters, technicians) are also in various shots doing their work – as in fact they were during the performances that were filmed to provide the footage for the court scenes, as these were live performances.13

11 The television adaptation starts with an abridged version of the overture, cuts most of the first two numbers of act I, scene 1, then omits the Norwich masque scene in act II, concentrating on the Whitehall dance scene, where the Queen humiliates Lady Essex. In act III, scene 1, the street scene is cut, giving this act in particular an air of a chamber play. For discussion on the libretto, see also Porter.

12 In 2006, The Queen (Stephen Frears), a film about the events of September 1997, offered a sympathetic variation on the loneliness of the central figure – the most important, yet often the most isolated.

13 There was some discontentment in the audience and the company with the fact that camera men were on stage and backstage while the company were performing to an audience.
The film *Gloriana* conveys a sense of gleefully using all the devices that are not available on an operatic stage: close up, point of view, cross fade, foregrounding, intercutting, reaction shot, voice over.

Phyllida Lloyd: I was determined to create an experience for the viewers that they could never have in an opera house. I wanted to use the medium of film to exploit the public and the private theme of the opera / performance and backstage. By following Elizabeth into that backstage world we could experience more intimately the agony of her dilemma.

One can distinguish between three levels of play in the way the dramaturgy of the opera and the world of the company create a discourse about private and public selves.

1) Enacting an opera company

This is the first mode we see at the beginning of the film. An abridged version of *Gloriana*’s overture is combined with a ‘get in’ situation. We see furniture arriving through the scene dock, and flats being arranged on stage. The overture references Renaissance incidental music and fanfares, and they provide a suitable sound for the bustle backstage. The camera is among (real) Opera North staff, some of them in backstage roles, some of them in the process of preparing to go on stage. We hear what is being spoken during the music. These staff members have been told not to act and are thus performing “non-acting” in a slightly heightened fashion, a play-within-a-play situation. Theorists such as Erving Goffman speak about ways in which the self is performed in normal life, but here, the social front is not created in an everyday manner, as staff are performing the ways in which they go about their work, rather than using behaviour for direct interaction with each other. The camera is not generally acknowledged, although this is not a strict rule, as a child performer walks past and pulls a friendly face at it. An unsettled atmosphere above the pre-performance rush develops, with the stage manager looking at his watch and staff asking questions like “Have you seen Jo?”, and the Deputy Stage Manager then calling “Dame Josephine to her dressing room!” The camera leaps around the building, one moment dropping onto the stage with a flat, the next following a wig on a dummy being carried into a dressing room. The entrance backstage of singers is shown, similar to overtures in other filmed
adaptations of operas, but different, inasmuch as we see them arriving privately, still as singers, not yet as characters. When Dame Josephine Barstow arrives, she is dressed casually in jeans and T-shirt, not wearing any make up. Her entrance attracts more attention than the previous ones we have seen, including the relief by backstage staff at her arrival. For the first time, the camera movement slows down while we accompany her to her dressing room, embracing Thomas Randle (Essex) on the way.

2) Operatic and private: onstage and backstage

This is a go-between mode, which is often functional on both the seemingly private and the stage plot levels. To continue from above with the first scene:

The camera has entered Dame Josephine’s dressing room with her, shutting out the music of the overture, and we look around at wigs and costumes, seemingly through her eyes. As she sits at her dressing table, we look into the mirror with her, and the music re-enters the room as she turns on the tannoy that transmits from the stage. The music seems to have been coming from the orchestra pit during the introductory passage (above), which is confirmed when it is excluded from the dressing room, and then brought in again through the tannoy – it is clear that the character Dame Josephine can also hear it, and it accompanies her transformation. She listens intently to an angry exchange between Essex and Mountjoy through the tannoy (half way through act I, scene 1), and we sense that she is now in the process of becoming the Queen, supported by her methodical preparations for the transformation. The overheard escalation between Essex and Mountjoy is shown as the ‘Queen’s’ purpose for getting into formal costume, as her intervention is required. While this happens, the pace of the actions quickens considerably, but we no longer see the central figure, just the paraphernalia of her regality: wig, gold dress, layers elaborate underwear, jewellery. There is a sequence of rapid intercutting between the hectic action in the dressing room and the Lords’ fight, which is on stage, but behind the closed curtain – it seems that we have access to it, but the theatre audience does not. The camera changes back to the Queen’s point of view after we see her hand opening the dressing room door. We see
chorus backstage in costume acknowledging her and bowing, we see many hands outstretched towards her, helping her onto a rostrum, and we see the closed flats that are about to open for her entrance. We still do not see the character we now assume to be the Queen, as we are looking from her perspective. This sequence has taken us up to the first public entrance of the Queen.

3) Liminality: stage and film modes combined

The stage world in the film *Gloriana* is not identical to the stage world of a live performance. The film uses performance to create an intermedial experience, where stage action is explored through filmic conventions. This creates a liminal viewing experience, at the edges of both media, which are moved closely together in the process.

At the fanfare-adorned moment of the Queen’s entrance (“Heaven, what have we here?”), so very different from Dame Josephine’s casual entrance backstage earlier, the camera switches to a total shot from the front, as a theatre audience would see it. The Queen is carried in on a golden platform, looking like a golden cage or, seen from the front, a picture frame. She is carried at shoulder height by courtiers and led by three real trumpeters. After this iconic entrance, which pays homage to portrait paintings of the Queen in mid-reign, the camera moves amongst the characters, at times looking down “as Elizabeth” on Essex and Mountjoy kneeling before her, at times taking their perspective to look up at her. After the Queen has made them shake hands and reconcile, both lords address the camera in confidential asides, as their muttered curses must not be overheard by anyone on stage. Around this time, we become conscious of a live audience in the theatre as part of what we are witnessing. We are not like them, but are given access to varying perspectives (one take shot from the back, one take shot from the flying gallery, for example), and the audience are, together with conductor and orchestra, integrated into our gaze. This scene is hybridic in its oscillation between filmic and theatrical conventions. The space never once pretends not to be a stage, and there are constant signifiers that bring the contrast of on stage and backstage to the fore. Yet the makers seem to delight in the liberties presented to them due to shot sizes, angles and camera perspectives. The device of point of view has already been used
heavily, but now the reaction shot, first seen in Dame Josephine’s dressing room, is extended to the Queen and her quarrelling lords. When the curtain comes down after a pageant with the Queen being carried above her subjects, swaying on the spot as if marching along, her quick change is done by the chorus ladies, her ladies-in-waiting, to whom she says “thank you,” as she receives a glass of water. The following scene, showing the Queen in dialogue with Raleigh, is entitled “Gossip and Government,” and it is suitably set in the dimly lit, disorientating environment of the wings of the Grand Theatre.

Throughout the film, contemporary connections are made: during an orchestral interlude, a shot of a modern newspaper with the headline “The man to bring peace to Ulster?” starts what would be act III, scene 1 in the opera, which begins with “What news from Ireland?”. This is followed by Essex invading the Queen’s chamber immediately after his arrival from Ireland. This second central scene between the Queen and Essex uses the close-up and point-of-view shot to startling effect. We feel that we see exactly what Essex sees when the unadorned, white, and curiously still Queen looks back at him after he has slashed the screen that shielded her privacy with his sword, exposing her as fragile and vulnerable. While this is very moving, Gloriana is not just an opera that personalises, or even romanticises, history. The ending is proof of this. Britten and Plomer decided upon an ending that separated the stately, represented through the Queen’s empty stately dress and “a death-like phantom of herself” that “approaches and fades” (Plomer in John 125). Although realised very differently, Lloyd’s filmic realisation communicates understanding of the distanciation Britten and Plomer decided upon here. If this final separation is about the person and the state in the libretto and many stage productions, then it is about the character and the singer in Lloyd’s television version. Dame Josephine’s immersion in the character is kept up through the Queen’s final speech to the audience. The tension of this moment is not just felt in the auditorium, but also backstage where we see production staff listening intently in the wings. After the speech, the Queen, suddenly fragile and old, is sup-

\[14\] William Plomer pressed for the inclusion of this scene, which was most coolly received at the 1953 gala performance; see also Alexander 15-151.
ported by three ladies-in-waiting and led offstage to her dressing room, past rows of production staff looking on with respect and pity. Alone in front of her mirror, the Queen takes her enormous red wig off, revealing wisps of white hair underneath. Her outburst “Mortua, mortua, sed non sepulta!” (Dead, dead, but not buried; Plomer in John 125) is sung at her reflection in an uncomfortable close-up. After the final exchange with Cecil (only his voice is heard), the Queen removes her white wig, the second layer of her character. Through this action, Dame Josephine re-emerges, and the agony on the Queen’s face is replaced by a tired and contented expression of the singer, as she sets about removing her white make-up. The scene fades out to the sound of applause from the auditorium and the stage manager’s voice directing the company in their curtain-calls. Britten and Plomer’s setting of the final scene is not meant to be about identification with the character of Elizabeth I, but about parallels in responsibility and the isolation of the role. Lloyd transfers this notion to parallels between the role of the Queen and of a principal singer, equating the end of a long reign and life with the end of a tiring performance.

**Conclusion**

It is hoped that this interpretation has shown alternatives to a comparative approach between source and adaptation, be it historical material, prose, stage or television. An interpretation that directly compares a dramatic biography to an opera libretto and compositional response is problematic, as is an approach that bemoans the fact that a television version is not a live performance. Another reason not to compare the latter two is the fact that I have only seen mediations of the stage version from which the television adaptation derived. This is not seen as a shortcoming, however, as the paper has aimed to show the television adaptation both as an adaptation and as a work in its own right. Those who were heavily involved in the stage production tend to take it as the benchmark against which the television version has to justify its creative choices. The importance of purpose and process in adaptation, and their differentiation from “intention” have also been central to this discussion. The context in which the adaptation exists and is received can assume parity to the importance of the context of the time it is set in,
and the context in which it was originally conceived. In the case of Glori-
ana for television, the prioritisation of the early 1990s context over that of 1953 contributed to its success.

All adaptations are prone to opportunities and to limitations within the possibilities of their medium, their context and, in some cases, their purpose. It seems a pragmatic, but not uncreative approach to create concepts that are not hell bent on creating a version that is “submissive” to the source, but something that operates within the conventions of its own medium and compensates for shortcomings in creative ways. Although aspects might be lost, invariably, many things will be gained. In the case of Gloriana, the liveness, the full scope of the opera and the flexibility and choice of focus that an audience will have is traded in for the closeness of a face and the drama it creates and the ease with which the action jumps between on- and backstage in the television version. If comparison need to take place, then thinking about what is lost and what is gained in an unemotional way creates a climate in which works can be interpreted according to the possibilities of their dramatic conventions.

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Gloriana – Agency, Context and Adaptation Studies


In her 2006 study *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon contends that adaptations offer the pleasure of “repetition with variation” (4). Plays have been adapted and (re-)staged repeatedly. Video games have been made into films and vice versa. Songs have been put together to form musicals, musicals have been made into movies. Novels have repeatedly been made into films. The list of adaptation sources appears to be endless. According to Thomas Leitch, the assumption that the “primary context within which adaptations are to be studied is literature” (64) is – much to his dismay – still dominating the field of Adaptation Studies, even though Hutcheon counters that adaptation should not be conceived as a mere binary exchange between literature and film, but as a far more promiscuous process (cf. Hutcheon 9-16).

In view of this diversity, it is surprising that one possible source is often neglected within Adaptation Studies – history. History is retold continuously (in modified forms, given that repetition implies deviation) and serves as background for historical novels, for films based on actual historical events, or provides material for documentaries. I would like to put forward the idea that putatively real events can even be “adapted” or borrowed rather than merely serving as an inspiration for a text.

By regarding history as a text,¹ we immediately enter the intertextual framework of texts adapting and adopting other texts. Structuralist

¹ This argument is mainly based on the assumption that a narrative imagination is central to any kind of history recording. Hayden White stresses the importance of
semiotics of the 1960s and 1970s treated all signifying practices as productive of “texts” and one is reminded of the “rewriting” impulse promoted by poststructuralism or Kristeva’s idea of any text as a permutation of others (cf. Kristeva 37). This idea chimes in with Barthes’ conception of a text as “a tissue of connotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture” (Barthes 170). Barthes sees every text as a “multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash” (170).

Drama adapts history; conversely, an important body of contemporary historiography describes the heavy reliance of historians on theatrical/narrative strategies: historians long for continuity (plotting). History is a narrative since it tells a story. When the historian wants to create the impression of truth, he draws upon theatrical techniques. When the documentary dramatist has the same objective, he copies the ceremonial forms of the historian such as researching, collecting, selecting and editing data (cf. Favorini xvii). In a similar vein, Julie Sanders argues in her 2006 study Adaptation and Appropriation that:

> [t]he discipline of history […] is in truth a history of textualities, of stories told by particular tellers according to particular ideologies and contexts. In this sense, history proves a ripe source and intertext for fiction, for histoire, to appropriate. (Sanders 146; emphasis in the original)

Likewise, Hutcheon approaches adaptations from the context of earlier studies of pastiche, opera, irony and intertextuality. In her previous studies, Hutcheon already mentioned that historiography is also inter-

the narrative elements of history writing and discusses the strategies of emplotment in historiography. For a thorough elaboration see The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1987) and Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978). In The Poetics of Postmodernism, Linda Hutcheon argues that we “know the past only through textualized remains” (123). In the case of the two plays discussed here, the playwrights could draw upon various sources, but especially based their knowledge of the court proceedings from trial records; from written documents and video material – therefore texts.

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textual because it deploys texts from the past within its own complete textuality (*The Poetics of Postmodernism*, 123).  

Thus, if we enlarge our view of “canonical” sources for adaptation and include adaptations based on non-literary or non-fictional source texts, the same criteria which are applied to identify something as an adaptation must therefore be applied to history as well. I suggest that history serves as a perfect source for adaptation and I will attempt to establish a theoretical framework for the “adaptability” of historical events. Such a project generates several questions: What, one might ask, is history on stage? If it is written down and later put on stage, is it still history, is it historiography, or is it an adaptation of real events? Does an adaptation of historical events raise the same theoretical issues as other adaptations? And to what extent does it participate in recent discussions within the field of Adaptation Studies? This paper enquires how the process of adaptation is referred to or used in two fairly recent plays about the Nuremberg Trials and looks at how such references interact with other factors such as genre. Besides, I am addressing the question if these plays can be (or rather want to be) recognized as autonomous works in their own right.

The first play is *Nuremberg: The War Crimes Trial* by Richard Norton-Taylor, which was commissioned for the Tricycle Theatre, London, in 1996. The second one, Abby Mann’s *Judgement at Nuremberg*, premiered on Broadway in 2001. In both cases the playwrights acted as gatherers of documentary materials. Both plays deal with the war crime trials held at the city of Nuremberg between 1946 and 1948. Norton-Taylor’s *Nuremberg* is a docu-drama or verbatim drama based on the original transcripts of the first and biggest of the trials, where the German major war criminals such as Hermann Goering, Albert Speer, Julius Streicher, Rudolf Hess or Alfred Rosenberg were tried for genocide and crimes against peace and humanity.

2 Hutcheon also distinguishes between “events” and “facts.” With regard to historical recordings, she proposes that the documents become signs of events which the historian transmutes into facts (*cf. The Poetics of Postmodernism* 122).

3 To be precise, Norton-Taylor does not even call himself a playwright, but the editor of the transcripts. Apart from the play, the first edition of the play provides
The second play, Abby Mann’s *Judgement at Nuremberg*, is a fictional account of the so-called “Judges Trial.” This was one of the subsequent tribunals held at Nuremberg, where high-rank judges and prosecutors were charged for complicity in crimes against humanity. In the words of Dr. Wickert, one of the characters in the play, it is about people who did what “was necessary for the protection of the country and adapted themselves to the new situation” (Mann 26; my emphasis). Significantly, this play is also an adaptation of Mann’s award-winning movie from 1961, which was itself an adaptation of a 1957 made-for-television film of the same title (the Academy Award was actually for best adapted screenplay). Only some slight changes were made in order to transfer *Judgement at Nuremberg* from the medium of film onto the stage. What is most notable is the change of the minor character Captain Byers into an African-American, who emphasizes the ubiquity of xenophobia: “I’ve known these people. They speak another language and dress differently, but they’re just like people in my hometown, people in my own unit” (Mann 11).

In contrast to Norton-Taylor’s *Nuremberg*, Mann’s courtroom drama operates within different dramatic conventions. The play has two acts, is further divided into scenes and includes lengthy and even epic stage directions which provide an insight into the feelings of the characters. Even though it strongly follows the form of the well-made play, it also bears some marks of a docu-drama. Mann claims to have travelled to Germany and to have interviewed people involved in this case, using their testimony to create some of the dialogues in his play (cf. xi-xiii). In addition, he included documentary material, for instance, news reel footage of the first trial in 1946 or of the Signal Corps’ horrific discoveries in the Buchenwald concentration camp:

COLONEL PARKER: Your honors, there are no words to fully describe what has happened. But we have a mute and eloquent witness…the camera’s eye. I now respectfully request the Tribunal to view what the camera saw.

Further documentary material (e.g. a list of convictions and sentences, notes on the defendants, counts they were charged with etc.) collected by him and Nicolas Kent, who also directed the first production.
The Adaptation of the Nuremberg Trials

[...] The MP switches on the projector. The screen is lowered. Documentary film footage from the signal corps is shown. (74-75)

Here, Mann relies on the (false) conception of the camera as an unbiased medium, a witness which is wholly objective and more able to grasp what has happened and to transmit it to the audience than an account given by a character. As in other passages of the play, he uses real documentary material as a stylistic device to visualize and underline the gravity of the crimes as well as to underscore the truthfulness of the story he depicts.

In comparing these plays, two ways of representing history can be detected: theatricalized history (in the case of Norton-Taylor’s Nuremberg) on the one hand and historicalized theatre (in the case of Mann’s Judgement at Nuremberg) on the other. Thus, we encounter two different modes of adaptation here: one that seeks to imitate and just transfers the source text from one sign system into the target text in another sign system, and one that borrows from a historical source and transforms and modifies it consciously.

According to Julie Sanders, an adaptation is basically a stylistic imitation of the source text (cf. 22-25). The term “source text” has provoked much debate concerning its implications of status and superiority. Dudley Andrew claims that the very term “representation” suggests the existence of a model (cf. 29). By insisting on the cultural status of the model (i.e. something is worth representing), adaptation delimits representation and foregrounds the adaptation process, which means that the original is considered as a worthy source or goal.

In his classification of subcategories of the umbrella term transtextuality, Gérard Genette already discussed the theoretical implications of a “model text” and produced the terms hyper- and hypertextuality. These terms refer to the relation between one text (“hypertext”) and an anterior text (“hypotext”), which the former transforms, modifies, elaborates or extends (cf. Genette 14f). In Nuremberg and Judgement at Nuremberg, the source text is a historical event which both plays seek to imitate in their very own way. Or, to stay within Genette’s terminology:
both plays are hypertexts4 which draw upon the same hypotext. This hypotext5 is regarded as a worthy source by both Mann and Norton-Taylor, as the following quotes illustrate:

When I first began writing *Judgement at Nuremberg* in 1957, it was considered a breach of good manners to bring up the subject of German guilt for the events that happened during the Third Reich. There was a new crisis with the Russians and Germany was suddenly our ally. Therefore it was eagerly accepted that the German people had been hypnotized by a great orator […]. McCarthyism was at its height when I read these transcripts. While there were no gas chambers, people were being destroyed financially and jailed because of their political beliefs or even because of who they knew. The question was on the table: Could what happened in Germany happen elsewhere? (Mann vii, x)

Yet even those who accept that the Nuremberg Trial was flawed insist that nevertheless it remains deeply significant. For the first time […] individuals were put on trial for sending their people to war and ordering them to commit atrocities...it was no longer enough to say: ‘We were just obeying orders.’ (Norton-Taylor ix)

As we can see here, the Nuremberg Trials do not only serve as a worthy source because of their historical significance. The questions and contradictions raised within these trials can be transferred to other more recent and topical historical and political events. Topicality is also listed as one of the main motivations for adapting: Aragay and Hutcheon both state that actuality appears to be one of the main reasons for undertaking the task of adapting. Adaptations automatically depart from their original source because of new cultural or historical contexts they address and can thus be seen as a cultural practice, as acts of discourses partaking of a particular era’s aesthetic needs and pressures (cf. Aragay 20). This topicality seems to be important for Mann and Norton-Taylor alike: The prologue of *Judgement at Nuremberg* begins with the narrator announcing:

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4 Genette distinguishes between two basic types of hypertexts: the first one is a simple transformation, the “einfache Transformation” (16), the second an indirect transformation, a simulation or imitation. It is also striking that Genette notes that a hypertext is usually regarded as more literary than hypotext.

5 Although Mann or Norton Taylor partly use different transcripts of the trials, they nevertheless rely on the cultural memory of the trials as their hypotext.
NARRATOR: On January 1, 2001, then President Clinton signed the Rome Treaty for an International Criminal Court. He said, ‘In taking this action, we reaffirm our support for international accountability and for bringing to justice perpetrators of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity based on our involvement in the Nuremberg Tribunals that brought Nazi war criminals to justice.’ Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina called Mr. Clinton’s decision ‘as outrageous as it is inexplicable. I have a message for the outgoing president. This decision will not stand.’ Many others echoed Senator Helms’ objections, including the incoming President Bush. Their reason was it could inhibit the ability of the United States to use its military to meet alliance obligations and participate in multinational operations. (3)

Likewise, Norton-Taylor emphasizes the parallels to current political matters:

Fifty years later, these words [referring to the idea that the trials may be used as a touchstone] have a hollow ring in the light of war crimes perpetrated by the Nuremberg victors – the bombing of Cambodia during the Vietnam War, for example, or the treatment of Algerians fighting for independence. (ix)

Norton-Taylor then echoes Noam Chomsky’s famous words: “[i]f the Nuremberg laws were to be applied, then every postwar American president would have been hanged” (quoted in Norton-Taylor ix), but he also reminds us that there is a silver lining since UN tribunals against Rwandan and Yugoslavian war crime perpetrators are going to take place.

These comments show that, in the face of current events, it seemed to be the right cultural moment for both Norton-Taylor and Mann to turn their hands on this specific past event. An adapted play as well as its source are subject to cultural and historical contextualization. Contextual forces, from biographical circumstance to ideological assumptions, play a crucial role in shaping the source text as well as the target text, making the target text a hybrid and undermining its claims to stability and centrality in any debate about adaptations and their sources (cf. Leitch 66). In other words, both texts (the hyper- and the hypotext) are products of their respective times. As Mireia Aragay has shown, an adaptation is also very much influenced by the critical reception of the source text since the adaptation is already “burdened by the weight of interpretations which surround the source” (26). In some passages of Mann’s play, the past is foregrounded as an intertextual space which
mirrors contemporary consciousness and the present-day views and valuations of the tribunals. Judge Haywood, the central character of the play, declares in his final verdict:

This Tribunal does not believe that the United States or any other country has been blameless of the conditions which made the German people vulnerable to the blandishments and temptations of the rise of Nazism. […] But this trial has shown that under the stress of a national crisis, ordinary men – even able and extraordinary men – can delude themselves into the commission of crimes and atrocities so vast and heinous as to stagger the imagination. (102-03)

In another scene, Rolfe, the defense attorney for Ernst Janning, participates in a very common discourse on denying guilt: “The truth is that these brutalities were brought about by the few extremists. The criminals. Very few Germans knew what was going on. We did not know!” (Mann 79). Contextual pressures were also at work when Mann changed the character Captain Byers into an African American for the sake of political correctness. Mann evidently rewrites the past in accordance with contemporary views and modes of representation.

As demonstrated above, there exists an ongoing reciprocal process between adaptation and hypotext. The reader’s/ audience’s knowledge of the trials is shaped by numerous documentaries of the trials; in turn, the perception of the source is transformed through the adaptation. Adaptation negotiates the past/ present divide by re-creating the source text as well as its historical context and a series of intertexts. Mann, for instance, rewrites the past by giving the audience two figures they might have wished for during the actual trials: Ernst Janning, the conscience-stricken Nazi-mind, and the morally superior Judge Haywood, who questions not only the Nazis, but also his own way of living. In her recent study A Theory of Adaptation, Hutcheon promotes the understanding of adaptation as a creative process, whereby adaptations are recognized as adaptations and enjoyed as such by the audience. The audience shifts back and forth between their experience of a new story and the memory of its progenitor(s) (cf. Hutcheon 173-74). Likewise, the spectators of a play which adapts a historical event also reallocate their knowledge of the event (e.g. learned in history classes or through other texts) and amend it to the newly gained knowledge provided by the adaptation. History becomes a process of layering, where text is laid
over text and is hence in constant flux. Rememberance is therefore an integral part of the pleasure of an adaptation. Significantly, securing rememberance is also one of the main tasks of an historian. Both playwrights seem eager to “remember” the events of the trials against major Nazi-criminals and their implications. Norton-Taylor begins the play with the original opening speech by Robert H. Jackson, Chief Prosecutor for the United States, who emphasizes that the crimes were so “devastating that civilisation cannot tolerate their being ignored” and that “we must never forget that the record on which we judge these defendants today is the record on which history will judge us tomorrow” (Norton-Taylor 3).6 Mann lets his fictional Judge Haywood emotionally utter that “[n]o one who sat through this trial can ever forget” (103).

Even though, as shown above, numerous layers of texts play a crucial role in shaping an adaptation, the fidelity discourse has dominated studies of adaptations for a very long time.7 If the hypertext is not faithful to the original, an adaptation is often regarded as inferior. Hierarchy seems to be prevalent even if ideas of the erosion of original and copy have long entered academic discussions. The same allegations hold true for the adaptation of a historical event: Did an author stretch history to serve his/her own fictional ends? Mann, for example, consciously appropriates and adapts documented facts of a particular event in order to shape his fiction as he, for example, creates fictional characters who are modelled after actual historical figures. With putting a piece of verbatim drama on stage, Norton-Taylor also implicitly affirms his

6 It is important to note that Norton-Taylor – in contrast to Mann – not only highlights the positive aspects and outcomes of the trial. He criticizes that “relatively little time was devoted to these atrocities which raised uncomfortable questions” (vii) and remarks that the “very title of the Tribunal – of German Major War Criminals – gave away its limitations” (viii).

7 It is striking that almost all new publications within the field of Adaptation Studies try to negotiate the problem of fidelity and lament the fact that the issue of faithfulness still haunts the discipline. In contrast to literary theory, where the idea of a god-like authorial figure has long been abandoned, Adaptation Studies still have to deal with the primacy of the fidelity criterion. For more detailed discussions see Sanders 155, Aragay 12-29.
truthfulness to his hypotext and sets out to present these past events with verisimilitude. In doing so, he neglects the fact that he has con-
sciously chosen to include only some of the transcripts which show only
parts of the hearing of five of the defendants. He selected them, ar-
ranged them in a specific order and included a very biased introduction
into the later publication of the play. In addition, Norton-Taylor did
not provide any description of the courtroom or of how props on stage
have to be arranged in the stage directions so that it remains the choice
of each director how accurate the rebuilding of the room should be.

By restricting itself to fidelity to the source text, this docu-drama
thus implicitly evokes its biggest generic limitation, which Derek Paget
calls the “inherent dichotomy of the documentary mode of representa-
tion” (quoted in Favorini xii). A docu-drama expresses a faith in facts on
the one hand and profound political scepticism towards the notion of
facts equaling truth on the other.

As can be seen in the various examples mentioned above, the adduc-
ing of fidelity to the original as one major criterion for judging the
adaptation is pervasive. But still, as with historiography, an adaptation
can always only come close to an accurate representation of past events.
Verbatim drama can come closest to fidelity, but it remains a selected
and arranged text (and finally put on stage with actors substituting real
characters). Thus, it strongly depends on the dramatist’s reading of the
events. According to Orr, fidelity criticism “impoverishes the film’s
intertextuality by reducing it to a single pre-text” (quoted in Aragay 19)
while neglecting other pre-texts (meaning hypotexts) and cultural or
theatrical codes which constitute other aspects of the text. This valua-
tion of the original also haunts the adaptation of historical events:
Norton-Taylor does not even dare to change his source, he only trans-
poses the historical record into another generic category. It is evident
that the event is of extreme significance for both playwrights. Whereas
recent Adaptation Studies tried to renounce the fidelity criterion, both
plays do not strive to be independent artistic achievements. Especially in
Nuremberg, one encounters an adaptation which paradoxically under-
mines itself by aiming at a faithful replication of the source text.

The stress on fidelity undervalues other important aspects of inter-
textuality, for example, non-literary influences at work such as the

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trends in the theatre, a particular theatre’s house style or the prevailing social and cultural climate. In this case, history and drama interpenetrate each other: a trial is a staging in itself as it “borrows” from another medium. Hence, the dynamics of (intertextual) exchange work both ways and thus undermine the claims of the superiority of the hypotext.

As I have shown, history might prove to be an adequate hypotext from which renewing and multifaceted adaptations can derive; these are adaptations, however, that must encounter the same problems and restrictions other adaptations are subject to. I raised the claim that – especially in verbatim theatre – the boundaries between source and target text are blurred. Moreover, I attempted to draw parallels between history and adaptations. Just as adaptation is a prime example of cultural recycling, a process which radically “undermines any linear, diachronic understanding of cultural history” (Aragay 201), certain patterns of history are also continuously repeating themselves. Both Mann and Norton-Taylor emphasize this idea by letting their characters state that similar mistakes are made over and over again – only by different agents.

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8 The metaphor of the theatricality and dramaturgical structure of a trial’s narrative goes back to Hannah Arendt (cf. Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil, 1963). A trial is an act of staging and performance, there are spectators and the main “characters” (the judges, defendants, attorneys, prosecutors, witnesses) sit in an exposed position (for example a witness box), which is similar to being on a stage.
Sarah Christine Giese


*Secondary Literature*


The Spoils of War –
The Adaptability of Euripides’ *Trojan Women* for the Representation of War and Conflict on the Contemporary Stage

“I wish to enter a protest against the use of the *Trojan Women* or any other Greek tragedy as a means of furthering a peace movement, raising money for the Red Cross, or stirring up sentiment for any specific cause, however worthy,” it is stated in a 1915 review in *The English Journal*. “These great expressions of Greek genius,” it continues:

have a message of their own which is of infinitely greater moment to the world than even the European war. To use them as mere instruments of propaganda is a crime against art. It is almost like robbing the sheeted dead. [...] The Greek figures were hopelessly overlaid by visions of bursting shrapnel in the Carpathians and Cossack raids in Eastern Prussia. Why should anyone be allowed to deface these lovely glimpses of the antique world by spraying over them an ill-smelling tincture of modernity? (Balaustion 398)

The “ill-smelling tincture of modernity,” indeed. The author might have wished to be spared being reminded of contemporary atrocities while watching “lovely glimpses of the antique world,” but Euripides’ tragedy, first performed in 415 BC, was not written as an uplifting, detached representation of an old legend. Possibly written during, and certainly performed immediately after the Athenians’ massacre of the adult males and the enslavement of the women and children of the island of Melos, it was intended to be adapted to contemporary war and conflict (Cartledge 31).
This essay will examine two modern adaptations of Euripides’ play. Women of Troy. Women of War was an ensemble production of the Western Michigan University drama department and the European premiere was at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in August 2004. Euripides’ Trojan Women was a production of the State Theatre Company South Australia (Adelaide), adapted by Rosalba Clemente and Dawn Langman in 2004. It will be discussed what the two adaptations of Euripides’ play have in common in terms of approach and changes to the original text. Both versions have added text to the translation they have used as a basis for their productions, and both rely heavily on montage and testimony. Tracing the themes touched upon in Euripides’ version and how they are taken up and adapted in the contemporary productions, it will be determined why this particular Greek tragedy has become so popular for the representation of contemporary war on stage.

1. Euripides’ Trojan Women (415 BC)

When Euripides wrote Trojan Women, the city of Athens had fought five wars at the end of which the defeated cities were left to a fate similar to that of Troy (Morrissey 7; Delebecque 251). According to the historian Thucydides, Athens perceived the Melian neutrality as a threat to the empire. In his History of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides portrays this episode in the form of a dramatic dialogue, in which the Athenian ambassadors argue that they had no choice but to suppress Melos, given that power had to protect itself, since:

in the human realm, justice is enforced only among those who can be equally constrained by it, and that those who have power use it, while the weak make compromises. […] Given what we believe about the gods and know about men, we think that both are always forced by the law of nature to dominate everyone they can. (5.89-105 [1998: p. 227-229])

A few months before the premiere of Trojan Women, Athens invaded Melos, killed the men, enslaved the women and children and colonized the island.

In portraying a contemporary war by retelling a mythological event, thus inviting the audience to identify and empathize with the victims of the massacre at Troy and, by indication, at Melos, Euripides laid the foundation for the many adaptations this play has undergone, especially
The Spoils of War

in the last three decades.¹ And it has always been used to comment on contemporary wars: in 1915, a production toured the US-American Mid-West sponsored by the Women’s Peace Party, during the Versailles negotiations in 1919, a production was mounted in Oxford, coinciding with the Oxford Conference of the League of Nations, and, immediately after the war, there were several performances at the London Old Vic (Macintosh 303-304). In 1964, Jean-Paul Sartre wrote a new translation of Trojan Women in response to the French war in Algeria, and, between 1972 and 1974, the Romanian author and director Andrei Şerban staged in New York a distilled adaptation of Euripides’ Medea, Trojan Women and Sophocles’ Electra under the title Fragments of a Greek Trilogy, a work he only finished after his return to Romania in 1991, when he transformed the adaptation into a saga of the Ceausescu family (Foley 6; Macintosh 320). Another notable adaptation was Tadasho Suzuki’s 1974 production in Tokyo, which applied the story to the defeated nation of Japan at the end of the Second World War (Marton 118).


According to the drama group of the Western Michigan University, the play’s adaptation was accompanied with research into protocols of war witnesses and other primary source texts which were then incorporated into the play.² Euripides’ drama is combined with testimony by war refugees from former Yugoslavia and also by Holocaust survivors, Northern Irish civil war victims, Vietnam veterans, victims of the Rwandan civil war, Chechnyan widows, American soldiers who were in Iraq, and by Iraqis who were in Baghdad under the 2003 bombardment. Excerpts were also taken from the Genovese conventions, from speeches by former U.S. President George W. Bush and by the then

¹ For increased popularity since 1969, see Hall, Macintosh and Wrigley 2004.
² Western Michigan University [WMU] 2004, program. I thank the director Joan Herrington for sending me the play script. The analysis of this play is based on personal attendance of the show on August 10th 2004 in Old St. Paul’s Church Hall in Edinburgh. WMU used Kenneth McLeish’s translation, see WMU 2004, program.
British Prime Minister Tony Blair, from original text taken from Slobodan Milosevic’s UN war crime trial, from a report of a stoning in Iran and also from a handbook of the Al Qaeda terrorists.

In form, the play depends on the underlying Euripidean text, following a dramatic unity of time, space and action: Hecuba is on stage throughout the play, thus ensuring coherence. The related time is identical with the discourse time and the action does not shift from the Greek camp. The contemporary textual elements and references added to Euripides’ text are not acted out but have the nature of reports that do not influence the action on stage or the characters. They are never spoken ‘in character’ but are uttered by various members of the cast who in these scenes take on the role of the chorus.

As far as extra-textual elements are concerned, the first stage direction defines the construction of a thematic framework for the audience: “Cast enters. Blackout. Soundscape of joy and celebration moving into violence and sorrow, with rough skeleton of sounds later appearing in the show” (WMU 1). This emphatic repetition of singular sound effects and snippets from longer passages of the dramatic text can be observed throughout the play.

In Euripides’ drama, the chorus tends to abstraction and generalisation, allowing for the emergence of an early variant of the epic in drama (Pfister 313-4). In Western Michigan’s revision, the sequence of images of suffering of the enslaved, mourning women widens to an epical representation which not only encompasses the distress of the defeated but also soldiers’ fear of death, the rhetoric of war-lords, the refugees’ misery, the mourning of those left behind and the victims of war crimes. The play thus unites all those subjects that are addressed separately in most other war plays.

The individual reports have a high recognition-value for the audience, since the majority are sourced from texts that have merged into the collective consciousness of European and North-American citizens; this applies specifically to the passages related to events around and after September 11, 2001 and to the war against Iraq and the ensuing occupation of the country which began in 2003. The description of the sacking of Troy by aid of the Trojan horse is contrasted with excerpts from a
document found in the luggage of one of the airplane hijackers involved in the 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States:

SPEAKER When the taxi takes you to the airport, remember God. When you have arrived and gotten out of the taxi, say a prayer in the place. Smile.

CHORUS [...] Girls, old women, shouting for joy, tricked, doomed.

SPEAKER Remember your luggage, the knife, your tools, your ticket, your passport. Before departure, let one of you sharpen his blade so that the one he butchers will be glad.

CHORUS They swarmed to the gates, [...] they dragged it – pine, polished, womb of Greeks – to offer it in Athena’s shrine [...]

[...]

SPEAKER As soon as you board the airplane, entering it and setting foot in it, say a prayer.

[...]

SPEAKER Open your heart to death in the path of God and remember God always.3

(WMU 24-25)

As the voices are only loosely placed into a dramatic context, they evade fictionalisation and are anchored in the audience’s reality. The episode quoted above indicates how the attack on the World Trade Center in New York must have been conceived by the U.S. population: the airplanes, like freighters hiding enemies in their bilges, attacked the country ‘from the inside,’ out of the country’s own airspace and entirely unexpected. Since the Twin Towers could be regarded as iconicographic symbols of the West, an analogy to Athena’s temple suggests itself.

The repeated listing of objects one would like to take along in the case of suddenly having to leave home juxtaposed with the promise young soldiers make to themselves not to “come home in a body-bag”

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3 The speaker’s text consists of excerpts from a hand-written document of five pages that was found in the luggage of plane hijacker Mohammed Atta. It was published in excerpts by the FBI on September 27, 2001. The historian Juan Cole carried out an analysis of this document, which presumably also was the source for this adaptation (Cole 2003). One has to keep in mind that this is an analysis of a play which premiered in 2004 – the events of September 11, 2001 happened only three years earlier, the U.S.-led invasion into Iraq only one year earlier, and there were still U.S.-American soldiers stationed in Iraq (as are at the time of writing this essay).
(WMU 15-16), the distressing reports of the citizens of Baghdad under siege, testimony of Bosnian women who were raped during the civil war and extracts from a speech given by President Bush before the begin of the war against Iraq in March 2003 underline the central proposition of this play: there is more than one truth in war. This feature appears prominently in WMU’s reworking of the Helen-episode during which Helen, whom the Trojan women see as the main culprit and as primarily responsible for the war, defends herself in front of her husband Menelaus. This mock trial, throughout which Hecuba ridicules Helen’s arguments, is complemented by testimony given by the former president of Yugoslavia Slobodan Milosevic, who was charged before the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in the Hague with crimes against humanity:

HELEN [...] All I and Paris did, was to benefit Greece, not Troy. [...] I should be wearing a victor’s crown. Instead, I’m sold for my beauty, spat upon.

SPEAKER I would like to say to you that what we have just heard, this tragic text, is a supreme absurdity. I should be given credit for peace in Bosnia, not war.

(WMU 44)

Menelaus’ and the Trojan women’s thirst for revenge is exposed through statements by US-American soldiers who see the war in Afghanistan after the terrorist attacks against the United States in 2001 as a chance for revenge (WMU 48). Thus the play examines why soldiers would come to a foreign country potentially to die there. The question about justification of or necessity for war can never be answered conclusively; and, not only in Troy, but also in Iraq the price seems to have been too high:


[...]

CASSANDRA What did they do? For one woman’s sake, one fuck, they hunted Helen, squandered a million lives. [...]

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SPEAKER I have to do this. It’s a me or you situation, an us or them problem. [...] I will not go home in a body bag.
SPEAKER 689 Americans dead since combat began.4
CASSANDRA So they flocked to the Scamander, lined up to die on a foreign river’s banks, on a foreign plain – for what?
(WMU 15-16, with script changes p. 1)

Western Michigan’s play’s main plot is concerned with the violent aftermath of war. The women’s war experience, consisting of rape, uprooting and enslavement, is of central concern and differs from the traditional male experience of combat and death on the battlefield (Helms 27). Euripides’ drama also constitutes an alternative view to Homer’s war-glorifying Trojan epic. While war idolisation presents heroic deeds, this play focuses on war as a means to destroy the very institution it claims to defend: the family. The deaths of Astyanax and Polyxena do not only symbolise the annihilation of a new Trojan generation. Rather, by embedding the testimony of a holocaust survivor into the Andromache-episode, the play stresses the cruelty of the Greek warfare, which kills the child to prevent the continued existence of its people:

ANDROMACHE What is it? You begin so carefully...
TALTHYBIUS Your son... How can I say it?
SPEAKER In front of us walked a young couple
ANDROMACHE Different masters? They’re separating us?
TALTHYBIUS No Greek will own this child.
SPEAKER One of the SS men offered a sweet
ANDROMACHE He’s to stay here, last trace of Troy?
SPEAKER The mother tugged to say answer him
TALTHYBIUS There’s no good way to tell the news I bring.
SPEAKER Open your mouth
ANDROMACHE Such reluctance. What is it? Some disaster?
TALTHYBIUS They’ve condemned your son to die.
SPEAKER He shot the child right through the mouth.
(WMU 36-37)

The messenger’s demonstrations of pity following the murder of the child are devalued by testimonies reporting on infanticides in My Lai;

4 This is in spring 2004.
the Holocaust-episode is quoted again, and one chorus member lists excerpts from the third Geneva Convention, stating that prisoners of war have to “be protected against acts of violence and intimidation” (WMU 51-53).


The female body as a place of war is central to the Euripidean text, and it is to this aspect that the modern adaptations may find almost ready-made analogies. The role of women and the relationship between genders play central roles in the ongoing spread of nationalism and ethno-nationalism in certain parts of the world, together with an increase in reactionary and fundamentalist politics. While the state is mostly depicted as male, the nation is represented as female, threatened by violence or foreign governance (Neissl et al. 10; Embacher 137-140). As Lorraine Helms points out, “[w]hat is besieged, whatever is penetrated, becomes by analogy female. Defensive warfare becomes a feminine enterprise” (30).

This is alluded to in the South Australian production by Clemente and Langman, in which Helen’s defence against the accusations brought against her by Menelaus and Hecuba picks up on her position as a “mythologized and gendered prize and scapegoat” (Thompson 129):

HELEN The rules are different for women -
We are like envelopes,
Carrying messages of conquest from one man to the next.
I’ve been bartered between two nations,
And now I am destined to be condemned by both.
[…]
Look at me,
You can’t blame all this on me.
This is about money, oil and power.
The Greeks hated the Trojans long before I was born.
The Greeks always wanted Trojan land and Trojan women.
The Trojans always wanted Greek oil and Greek women.
That’s not my fight.

5 The play text refers here to Part II, Article 13 of Convention (III) relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War (1949).
I’m only the myth men die for.
I’m the women on the porn sites you feed to your soldiers,
Before you send them in to kill.
But I am real!
Look at me, Menelaus…
I am REAL!
(Clemente/Langman 28-32)

David Rosenbloom remarks on Helen’s function as “a figure for exploring imperialist desire, appropriation, and justification,” describing her as “an agalma, a ‘treasure’”. As a form of symbolic capital, it signifies “a trophy of victory and an effigy of the defeated. […] An agalma embodies the pride of victory, especially in war” (Rosenbloom 248-51).

The female body has thus become a symbol for the body of the people; accordingly, rapes in war may signify the humiliation of the male opponent and the ‘desecration’ and destruction of the enemy culture. Mass rape in war and in national conflicts can therefore be understood as a war strategy: the female body becomes the projection screen for the friend-foe-discourse (Neissl et al. 12; Embacher 141). The destruction of Troy and the sovereign’s death are the prelude for a mass rape which marks the annihilation of the Trojan families as the chorus states: “Blood steams on our altars, men’s blood, the blood of Troy. […] girls, widows, groan in our beds, seedbed of baby Greeks, seedbed of tears for Troy” (WMU 26, Morrissey 9).

4. Greek Tragedies and Contemporary Conflict

What makes Greek tragedy adaptable to contemporary circumstances? Helene Foley argues that it “permits a political response to irresolvable, extreme situations without being crudely topical.” As the plays are:

set in an imaginary past that offers few specifics in the way of setting or physical description, it is also amenable to both changes of venue and to multi-racial casting […] Every contemporary performance of a Greek tragedy must be an adaptation of sorts, since it involves translation of the language of the original and confronts a profound ignorance of the music, dance, and theatrical context that conditioned its first presentation. (Foley 3-4)

In his study of Greek tragedy on African stages, Kevin Wetmore suggests that, in the case of adaptations, the audience does not need to understand or be familiar with the original tragedy, but must understand
concerns, themes and points of the adaptation and how these are relevant to the audience (23). Certainly, including textual passages that anchor the ancient tragedy in the present or in a historical context the audience is familiar with encourages a strong sense of identification. But are the modern complementations necessary, or could and should the text stand by itself? A modern audience would possibly have made the connections to historical and contemporary events without being shown how to associate the text with their external reality. But Western Michigan’s production very effectively anchors the ancient text within other texts the audience is often quite familiar with. The passages, eerily correlating and echoing each other, evoke the image of transparent layers of history, of “one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage,” as Walter Benjamin describes the concept of history (257).

This idea of a circular, self-repeating history is also evoked by Cassandra’s reproachful call for Apollo in Clemente’s and Langman’s version:

Cassandra I thought to please you, God,
But made you angry instead.
You spat in my mouth,
And made me see horrors of the future.
They spew and gabble:
Chickamauga, Nek, Melos,
Gulag, Passchendale,
Rwanda, Rwanda,
Taliban, Jericho.
[…].
Dance with me, Mother.
History is a whirling maze.
(Clemente/Langman 12)

While Western Michigan University only uses verbatim testimony or documents they edited, other authors such as Langman and Clemente have employed modern references to modify the translated primary text. In an interview, Rosalba Clemente, the director of the Trojan Women production in Adelaide, points at something she terms “twenty-first century consciousness” as being the driving force behind their production (Thompson 177). It is an interesting term. Clemente employs it as an umbrella phrase to cover ‘modern’ concepts such as peace and
conflict studies, feminism, social justice and human rights (ibid.). While one could argue about whether all of these concepts are really such recent developments, it is the concerned activist of the Global Justice Movement that shines through in this statement. This relatively young movement is still in the state of becoming and has not yet fully shaped its conceptual ideas, which might account for the vagueness of Clemente’s statement: above all, it captures a general ‘concern’ about global economical and sociological ‘issues.’

This suggests that many modern adaptations of *Trojan Women* might have originated from a form of communal helpless ‘Western guilt,’ which arises from the recognition of the suffering that Western citizens (might) have inadvertently brought on. Hence, the atmosphere of the plays may contribute to the ‘21st-century-consciousness.’ The genesis of Euripides’ play exposes a colonial context, with Troy cast in the role of the barbarian city in Asia Minor, mirroring the Athenian’s very recent brutal colonising of the isle of Melos, the sack of the city being told from the viewpoint of the ‘other,’ thus opening it up to a post-colonial reading. Sartre situated his 1965 adaptation explicitly ‘in Europe’ to bring up

the equivalent of the ancient antagonism which existed between the Greeks and the barbarians, that is, between Greece and the civilisation around the Mediterranean, and the gradual infiltration into Asia Minor where Colonial Imperialism arose. (289)

It was this Greek colonialism that Euripides denounced.

Western Michigan embeds the last lines of Euripides’ original drama into a montage of several war scenes and combines them into an episode of epic mourning, which again takes up the image of the falling towers - a symbol for the uprooting of the Trojan people, but after 2001 also part of the collective imagination. The voices weaving through the original drama function as a mirroring sub-plot, a means of generalization (Pfister 294). It is possible to follow different threads of narrative – not always spoken by the same members of the cast – and scraps of information will form the stories of individual characters, but never complete them. By denying the audience a clear subplot and thus refusing to allow unambiguous classification and interpretation, the montage becomes a projection screen for all past and present wars. As if looking down a
well, one’s gaze is directed through the different layers of fates and personal testimonies onto the basic story in which Hecuba passes on the responsibility to all women to tell and retell the horrific story of what happened in this first Gulf war, the battle of Troy.

Works Cited

Primary Literature


Secondary Literature


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V. **Intercultural Adaptation**
Adapting or translating the work of a living writer contains its own terrors, but when it works you have the wonderful security of knowing that the original parent approves of the world into which you’ve taken their baby. Adapting the work of a writer long gone, on the other hand, gives you much more freedom. You can, of course, do whatever you like to make it work, the baby is orphaned, completely in your care, you could send it anywhere you choose. But could you live with yourself if you wrested that child away from everything it ever knew or buried any memory of its first, real mother? (Rona Munro, “Welcome”)

What is it that gives a particular piece of theatre an appeal which transcends the culture from which it originally emerged? The processes of translation and adaptation clearly have a role in the successful engagement of audiences of different periods and cultures with a particular play in performance; but are there certain themes and issues that transcend borders of time or place?

Rona Munro’s Iron has been translated into at least fifteen different languages, and licenced for performance in at least twenty-one different countries. It is difficult to ascertain exactly how many productions have

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1 My warm thanks to all those who very generously gave of their time and their thoughts, including Elli Papakonstantinou (Director, Athenian production of Iron), Hiromi Nakayama (Producer of the event at Itami), Katherine Mendelsohn (Literary Manager, Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh), Mariko Inaba (Japan Foundation), Takehiko Tanioka (Translator of Japanese version of Iron) and particularly, to Rona Munro, the playwright herself.
be staged, in these different countries, since its first performance on Friday 26 July 2002 at the Traverse Theatre; but it is safe to say that there have been quite a few.

Why should it be so that particular plays and playwrights somehow capture the imagination of so many different audiences in different geographical locations? Is it possible that certain pieces of work have a “universal” quality; and if so, what is the nature of this “universality”?

Can there be something about a play which engages the spectator in a particular way which transcends cultural considerations? Something fundamental to the subjectivity of the spectator, perhaps, which might be considered unchanging in the face of geographical, linguistic or cultural difference?

In order to explore this possibility, this paper – drawing on two particular and complementary theoretical models of spectatorship – works towards the construction of a tentative “account” of the “universal” allure of the play.

Iron: A Story Revealed

Set in a woman’s prison, the play tells the story – in linear time – of a mother (Fay) serving a life sentence for murder, and a daughter (Josie)’s quest to unlock her own childhood, using her mother as the key. Josie is visiting her mother, Fay, for the first time in fifteen years, following the death of her paternal grandmother. A murder lies between Fay and Josie, one which Josie cannot remember, and Fay can neither articulate nor forget. Josie cannot remember, and wants to recover this loss; and in order to do so, she returns to the only person who holds this information. Fay, it transpires, has never spoken of the events of the night her husband died; and in the course of the play, during the meetings between the two women, a story is revealed. Fay and Josie slowly get to know each other. Josie remembers little of her childhood; and the play is a complex exploration of anger, frustration, violence, love and loss, which foregrounds the significance of acts of remembering.

Written in “conventional” form – two acts, four characters who maintain an illusion of realism, a “realistic” setting, “realistic” dialogue, and a narrative which (although often containing dialogue which describes events from the past) is chronologically ordered – the notion
of disturbance is contained within the characterization and dialogue. Most of the “action” is conveyed through dialogue: there is no on-stage violence, only an account of that (“other scene”) which has taken place elsewhere. The action takes place over a period of some weeks, punctuated by Josie’s “visits” to the prison; and the drama of this piece rests on the slow and painful recovery of the past.

What the spectator witnesses is a physical representation of containment and repression, both in terms of the prison (the manner in which our culture deals with people and actions which fall outside of the acceptable), and in terms of discourse (which “contains”, within the boundaries of language, the state of trauma which led to - and resulted from - the act of violence, by allowing only partial representation; a description of psychical pain which falls short of what is “really” taking place).

The narrative of Rona Munro’s Iron offers an account of loss and recovery, of both memory and of the maternal, the (m)other. This is a long and painful process for the characters; and for the spectators, too, confronted with the representation of a loss which is unnamed and unnameable.

A House Built on Mud: Staging the “Other Scene” of Primal Fantasy

JOSIE […] I don’t remember a thing before my eleventh birthday. Not a sight, not a sound, not a smell … nothing. I look back and my head’s empty as a balloon […] …. I’d never told anyone. Never really realised that was what was going on … And he said that was terrible, that was like living in a house built on mud … you never knew when it would rise up through the floorboards and swallow you up. (Iron 27)

This statement is central to the play, and to this discussion, in its oblique reference to several inter-related themes: firstly, memory and loss of memory; secondly, repression and the “danger” of the return of the repressed; and thirdly, the nature of fantasy.

Iron might be read as a fantasy of origins, both in terms of the narrative structure of the piece - the daughter’s quest to discover the lost part of her past, an absence which is literally haunting her – and also in the very syntax of the play and the relationship it facilitates between representation and spectator. Wheeler and Griffiths observe that
Freud regards the child, endlessly curious and excluded from the secret sexual heart of the family, as pre-eminently, we might say, an audience; watching and listening to the sights and sounds of the family; its sayings, its history, its articulated relationships, its obscure and obscured noises, its visible, invisible and half-glimpsed and half-heard secrets and signs. Within and from this web of what will come to be perceived as signifiers, the child must find or, more accurately, fantasise its own identity, its own place.

For Freud, the three primal fantasies of origin are the fantasy of parental coitus (“the primal scene”, which “accounts” for the child’s origins), the fantasy of seduction (which “accounts” for the afflux of sexuality), and the fantasy of castration (which “accounts” for the recognition of sexual difference). These fantasies, which are retrospectively engendered at puberty through Nachträglichkeit, emerge from an earlier economy of hearing and seeing which makes it possible for the child to organize a relatively coherent identity in relation to the profound questions it asks about its own origins. (Wheeler and Griffiths 187)

Wheeler and Griffiths suggest that “[w]ithin a representation the psychical ‘pay-off’ […] for the watcher and listener […], is not necessarily to be found in a simple identification with a character but in the general syntax of the representation” (186); and they account for the lure of the theatrical mise-en-scène in terms of the extent to which it engages the three primal fantasies of origin, arguing that

[In the theatre, and unlike film, the economy of seeing and hearing we are offered is just as immediate and as vital as the drama of the family from and through which we negotiate our precarious subjectivity. The danger of the theatre, the possibility of failing to maintain the illusion, of extraneous noises which should not be heard, of the collapse of the role and of the fiction of assumed identities, of fluffed or forgotten lines, of props which make noises which they shouldn’t, all combine to reproduce precisely the erotic, libidinal danger of the Oedipal family which the primal fantasies emerge to structure and contain. Thus we are arguing that the theatrical event, or rather its “other scene” (ie of the primal fantasies), repeats and re-enacts the structural conditions which enable subjectivity to emerge by representing, with the same effect of danger, precisely the imaginary conditions of their emergence. The success of the theatrical mise-en-scène may then depend partly upon the extent to which it puts into play in structured form the three primal fantasies of origin in which the audience invest, and from which they gain satisfaction in the form of the representation of the boundaries of identity in the context of the story which the play then unfolds. (188)

Here, Wheeler and Griffiths raise some interesting issues in relation to any discussion on the “universalism” of Iron. As they observe, not all
plays manifest all the primal fantasies to the same extent; but it is interesting to observe that, in the case of Iron, traces of all three can be found in both the narrative of the play, and in the “general syntax” of its structure.

The story of the piecing together in retrospect of events, the nature or “meaning” of which neither the spectator, nor the character of Josie, nor – it could be argued – the character of Fay, are initially aware, would appear to engender the very process of Nachträglichkeit, through which the characters progress to a point of “knowledge.” The theatrical representation itself provides a parallel experience for the spectator, a momentary unconscious reminder of an unconscious previous process and experience.

This paper argues that the play facilitates a “reminder” or “reactivation” of this “other scene,” through both explicit representation of aspects of the fantasies of origin (staging, in effect, representations of this “other scene” which underpins all fantasies) and “encoding” the fantasies which comprise this “other scene” within (a) the story itself (the search for the recovery of memory), in (b) the characters (in their ambivalent positions in regard to the past), and in (c) the very syntax of the representation, which places the spectator, like the child, in that position of danger, of not knowing, and of exploring (from the safety of a seat in a theatre auditorium), through the repetition and re-enactment of the structural conditions which enable the emergence of subjectivity, the very boundaries of identity. And here lies, to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the precision of the representation or re-enactment, the allure for the spectator, of the theatrical representation. For this short time, the spectator experiences a sensation akin to that described by the character of Josie, of living in “a house built on mud”, never knowing if, or when, “it would rise up through the floorboards and swallow you up.”

Examining in more detail the re-enactment of the three primal fantasies – the fantasy of parental coitus (the “primal scene” which “accounts” for the child’s origins), the fantasy of seduction (which “accounts” for the afflux of sexuality) and the fantasy of castration (which “accounts” for the recognition of sexual difference), it could be argued that traces of all three are woven into the very fabric of the play.
The Primal Scene

Looking first at the fantasy of the “primal scene”, this echoes the central theme of the play: the quest on which Josie embarks in order to recover the memory she has lost – “I’ve got no memories, but you have. You know everything” (Iron 27) – through which she hopes to discover something about herself. The “primal scene” is, at one point, literally described, when Fay relates a story to Josie about the night she was conceived:

FAY God one night we ended up in the sea, naked in November! We nearly died. We nearly got arrested. We were coming home along the front walking and snogging at the same time ... you know that way you do when you’re warm and boozy and happy and you don’t care who sees you.... And the sea was calm as a big grey tablecloth all ready to shine when the morning slid out onto it ... Come to think of it you might have come out of that night. The timing’s about right. (Iron 54)

There are other examples, also: Fay says of her mother-in-law: “She used to love me. She said I was the daughter she never had” (Iron 19); Guard 2 articulates her feelings for Fay: “You could be my mum couldn’t you? Can’t get my head around it at all” (Iron 34); and there are various references throughout the play to the nature of the maternal bond.

The fantasy of the primal scene is also re-enacted within the structure of the play, and within the spectator-representation relationship. In terms of the narrative structure, the characters and the spectators are “kept in the dark” until the very end; and even then, the knowledge revealed is ambiguous and inconclusive. In terms of chronological structure, the play runs in chronological order, through a sequence of meetings which are sometimes weeks apart; each meeting is set in the present, but within the language, the action moves between present and past, as the past is – piece by piece – retrieved and articulated. The spectator, along with the characters, is imprisoned in the present (in terms of the physical setting of the prison, in terms of the dialogue of the play, and in terms of the circumstances of their own lives); and the economy of seeing and hearing experienced by the spectator – sitting in the darkened auditorium, trying to make sense of a story told in retrospect, but unfolding in the present – is “as immediate and vital as the
drama of the family from and through which we negotiate our precarious subjectivity” (Wheeler and Griffiths 188).

**Fantasy of Seduction**

Moving on to the second of the three primal fantasies, that of seduction (which “accounts” for the afflux of sexuality), there are, within the narrative, several accounts of seduction: most obviously the description of the relationship between Fay and her husband which led to the description of Josie’s conception; but also Josie’s account of her clumsy attempts to do her mother’s bidding in going out socially. Fay fantasises about living vicariously through Josie (“Isn’t it stupid what you imagine when you’ve nothing else to do?” Iron 91). More complex, however, is the seduction of Fay by Josie into – finally – articulating the past; and of Josie by Fay, into the fantasy of the mother/daughter relationship. The female guard, also, is drawn into a relationship with Fay where “boundaries were blurred” (Iron 58), the result being disillusionment and disappointment. The spectator, too, is drawn in by the narrative structure, where the information given is intriguing but never quite enough, and the implied promise (that the “truth” will be revealed) is never realised: the “reality” is not that black-and-white. Within the narrative, Josie does, however, “move on”; she has gained knowledge of “the truth,” albeit an unwelcome truth, and this has freed her to move beyond her past, a freedom represented through the use of colour in her costume (from black to red). Interestingly, the only character who does not appear to engage in the dynamic of seduction is that of the male guard, George; and again the fact that he is the only (living) male character carries significance – within a patriarchal structure (the prison, and discourse itself), the male guard represents the framework, as a benign containing witness to all that takes place.

**Fantasy of Castration**

In regard to the third primal fantasy (castration), the final act on the part of Fay, in which the scene of her husband’s death is articulated, can be read as a re-enactment of the scene of castration in at least two ways. In the more obvious way, it is the death of The Father, and the revelation of the point at which Josie somehow lost everything that happened
before that moment, the point where the Symbolic was somehow compromised; but it is also a moment of great sacrifice for Fay ("It’s a very painful thing, remembering, and you’re asking me to do it for both of us" *Iron* 38), in that she knows that revealing the final key to Josie’s lost past and freeing her from it will also damage – if not destroy – the bond that had drawn Josie to her. Fay is releasing Josie from the prison of her past: "You should remember your Dad and go away from here and never come back" (*Iron* 97). The play is structured upon the recognition of loss; and castration signifies the loss or repression of a pre-Oedipal desire, and also the possibility of symbolic exchange. Fay, in giving Josie back her past (and physically losing Josie in the process) is also retrieving her own identity as that of the selfless mother.

The various re-enactments of the three primal fantasies offer multiple points of entry for the spectator; and the varying levels of engagement with the play in performance (on the part of the spectator) might in part find “account” in the varying abilities of individual spectators to manage their own boundaries of repression.

Wheeler and Griffiths, in the context of a different play, observe that the incomplete primal fantasies which are played out are fantasies of a psychotic failure to achieve identity, and that the play in question, playing these out

via a fantasy of the problematic which patriarchy makes of feminine sexuality makes it simply a restatement of the old formulation that the woman who fails to accept that power (and sexual difference) is defined by the phallus is mad. (193)

This could equally be said of *Iron* in that the central question rests on the motivation of a woman in killing her husband; and Fay’s resistance to articulating this central issue within the terms of the symbolic provides the main source of dramatic tension throughout the piece.

*Rising up through the floorboards: Trauma Theory*

Returning to the theme of memory, and the recovery of lost memory, this is a play which engages with repression, both in terms of narrative content and in terms of the very syntax of the piece: *Iron* explores the dynamics of trauma, through both narrative structure (the recovery and disclosure of repressed memory) and syntax (the spectator’s “not
knowing,” and not having a stable position) of the play, which constantly represses the memory of an initial traumatic event until the moment where it is – for the first time – revealed. Peter Buse, in a description of Sarah Kane’s Blasted, observes that the play is

a piece of speculative excavation, a narrative constructed from bits and pieces of information which the play lets fall without ever assembling them in a coherent fashion. It cannot be otherwise with trauma, Shoshana Felman would argue. It is the very nature of trauma to resist being accounted for in a completely coherent or easily comprehensible way. (181)

This could equally be observed of Iron. In the narrative, Josie attempts to have her mother’s case reviewed on grounds of diminished responsibility, but Fay resists this course of action, partly – it could be argued – because of a fear, after fifteen years, of having her safe world disrupted; but perhaps, also, because of an unwillingness to deny responsibility for intensity of feeling, or to accept being culturally defined (within the framework of a patriarchal discourse) as “insane”. Fay is guilty – of loving her husband (“I loved your dad. That’s why he upset me so much” Iron 41); of loving her mother-in-law (“I was family” Iron 53); of loving her child (“I remember every moment of your life from when you were born till the day they took me away from you” Iron 23); of feeling anger and frustration (“I felt so full of crying that I was just tight with tears” Iron 96); of being unable to locate a cause which might have made her actions more culturally acceptable; of being prone to outbursts of aggression (“Oh I’m terrible. I take rooms apart with my teeth. But I can’t help myself, I can’t.” Iron 41); of inspiring trust and care (“She took my heart out and showed it to me” Iron 57); and of betraying that trust (“She took me for a mug” Iron 58); but most of all, of feeling things which cannot be understood within the Symbolic Order (“I’m trying to imagine it.” Iron 33). But the notion of guilt is itself foregrounded by this play as a problematic construction. The character of Fay has certainly transgressed a number of boundaries; but which are the ones which render her “guilty”? And why?

Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, in a section of their book addressing psychoanalytic work with trauma, describe the experience of trauma for the subject, observing that
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Trauma survivors live not with the memory of the past, but with an event that could not and did not proceed through to its completion, has no ending, attained no closure, and therefore, as far as its survivors are concerned, continues into the present and is current in every respect. The survivor, indeed, is not truly in touch either with the core of his traumatic reality or with the fatedness of its re-enactments, and thereby remains entrapped in both...[and]... [to undo this entrapment in a fate that cannot be known, cannot be told, but can only be repeated, a therapeutic process – a process of constructing a narrative, or reconstructing a history and essentially, of re-externalizing the event – has to be set in motion. This re-externalisation of the event can occur and take effect only when one can articulate and transmit the story, literally transfer it to another outside oneself and then take it back again, inside (69)

This account very neatly describes the experience of the central characters of Fay and Josie, who – within the narrative – both live with the consequences of the moment of trauma, physically, emotionally and psychologically. In psychical terms, it could also be argued that the play is a re-enactment of the position of the feminine subject in discourse, always subject to the violence of the Oedipal crisis, either as mother or child, in terms of the loss required in order to enter into the Symbolic. For Fay, the moment of trauma and loss is, literally, unspeakable; for Josie, the consequences of the moment of trauma are retrospective – the loss of everything that went before. The play re-enacts a process of “constructing a narrative, or reconstructing a history”; and what the spectator experiences is the moment of articulation and transmission of the story, transferred to another: a character within the fiction, and the spectator within the frame of the theatrical representation. Furthermore,

[for the listener who enters the contract of the testimony, a journey fraught with dangers lies ahead. There are hazards to the listening to trauma. Trauma – and its impact on the hearer – leaves indeed no hiding place intact (Felman and Laub 72)

Interestingly, within the fiction, the therapeutic process would appear to be two-way: Fay and Josie are, together, reconstructing the past; and it could be argued that this therapeutic process also finds resonance in the spectator-representation relationship, as the spectator pieces together the story, “filling in the gaps” on several levels, and negotiating the “journey fraught with dangers” from the relative safety of the audito-
rium, an experience which echoes that of the child described by Wheeler and Griffiths who negotiates the “erotic, libidinal danger” of the theatre which reproduces that of the “Oedipal family which the primal fantasies emerge to structure and contain” (Wheeler and Griffiths 192).

To this point, this paper has considered a multiplicity of points of entry into the play which might facilitate the engagement of the spectator, and has considered the nature of the engagement of the spectator in the narrative and structure of the play. This is the theory (or, at least, one theory); but how has the play worked in practice?

Stages of Translation: Athens, Itami and the UK

As stated above, Iron has been translated into approximately fifteen different languages and licenced for performance (and sometimes produced more than once) in at least twenty-one different geographical and cultural locations. Originally produced and performed in the UK at the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh in 2002 (directed by Roxana Silbert), the play has been subsequently translated into Greek and performed in Athens in 2003 (directed by Elli Papakonstantinou), and into Japanese and performed as a rehearsed reading at the Ai Hall, Itami, Osaka in 2006; and I have been fortunate in having the opportunity to review aspects of the process with a number of those involved in the three productions, including Elli Papakonstantinou (Director, Athenian production); Hiromi Nakayama (Producer of the event at Osaka); Katherine Mendelsohn (Literary Manager, Traverse Theatre); Mariko Inaba (Japan Foundation); Takehiko Tanioka (Translator); and Rona Munro, the playwright herself.

In regard to these three specific productions – Itami, Athens and the UK – it would seem that, on a pragmatic level at least, the themes of the play – the mother/daughter relationship, domestic violence, imprisonment – were universally familiar. The responses of those with whom I spoke indicated a high level of audience engagement with the productions in the geographical / cultural locations mentioned above.

In Athens, the production – at certain points – provoked tears, from both women and men; and it played to full houses. In Itami, the duration of the rehearsed reading was much longer than would normally be the case at such an event, but (although convention permitted them to
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leave) the audience remained to the end. In the UK, the Edinburgh production played to full houses; and the production transferred to the Royal Court in London, where it received consistently positive critical reviews.

Having identified an example of a piece of theatre which has – in practice – achieved a degree of cultural mobility, it is the nature and process of audience engagement which is at issue here.

An audience are the embodiment of a culture in which a production is staged; and although the audience are guided in their reading by the “clues” left by the director, they cannot but bring to their reading certain preconceptions. A play such as Iron is likely – on a conscious level – to connect with, and challenge, certain conceptions of “reality,” particularly in terms of the themes it addresses, of family relationships, of criminality, female violence and punishment; and if there is a dislocation or schism between what an audience “know” and what they see represented, then this must – at some level – create an emotional, psychological or intellectual response (be it one of engagement with, or of rejection of, the representation).

Bearing in mind, however, that not all plays addressing these themes have been so “universally” successful, is the existence of these themes sufficient explanation of the transcultural, translingual allure of this play?

The themes and staging, alone, would not seem to account for the consistency of audience engagement reported by those with whom I spoke: the stagings, although creative and appropriate, were not unusual; and the themes – although sensitively and imaginatively staged – were not in themselves particularly controversial or shocking. Not every play addressing these themes achieves this cultural mobility: so what it is about this particular play which facilitates the transgression of geographical and cultural boundaries?

Could the response of the audiences find account in terms of the “universal” nature of the Freudian models of subjectivity outlined? This paper would argue that there may exist a correlation between the presence of a possible Freudian reading (in terms of primal fantasy and of trauma theory) and the engagement of the spectator.
Conclusion

Returning, then, to the central question: was there something about this particular play which engaged the spectator in a particular way which transcended cultural and linguistic considerations, something fundamental to the subjectivity of the spectator which might be considered unchanging in the face of geographical or cultural difference?

The focus of this paper specifically concerns the question of the engagement of the spectator, as Freudian subject, and the nature of this particular piece of theatre which appears to “universally” engage this Freudian spectator / subject, across geographical and cultural boundaries. One must, however, recognize the existence and significance of further questions in regard to the cultural context of the director and cast, and of translation and adaptation, in this process. It has been necessary to limit the focus of this discussion to the various points of entry into the performance text which might facilitate the engagement of the spectator, and the nature of the engagement of the spectator in the narrative, syntax and structure of the play; but this is not intended in any way to negate the significance of these other elements in the overall process of translation, adaptation, production and reading of a piece of theatre.

Furthermore, definitive proof of the correlation mentioned above, between Freudian reading and spectatorial engagement, would, of course, require a large scale empirical study of a range of plays in translation and production within the frameworks of (a) their level of structural engagement with primal fantasy and with trauma theory and (b) the construction and application of a consistent empirical model of audience engagement. But the possible existence of this correlation would seem, in this particular instance, to provide a coherent account of the allure of this particular piece of theatre.

In regard, then, to the spectator, primal fantasy, as a model of engagement, would appear to offer a persuasive “account.” As observed by Wheeler and Griffiths (cited above), “[t]he success of the theatrical mise-en-scene may […] depend partly upon the extent to which it puts into play in structured form the three primal fantasies of origin in which the audience invest” (188). In the case of Iron, these fantasies appeared
to permeate the structure and syntax of the play; and the production achieved a fair amount of critical success.

Trauma theory would also seem to offer some interesting insights. Felman and Laub (cited above) observe, in the context of the traumatic event, that the “re-externalisation of the event can occur and take effect only when one can articulate and transmit the story, literally transfer it to another outside oneself and then take it back again, inside” (69). This process seems to echo those of the structures of the play, of spectator-ship, and also of translation and adaptation, creating a web of interesting relationships.

Both these models – primal fantasy and trauma theory - relate to the very process of “becoming,” of subjectivity itself; and this process of subjectivity could – it might be argued – be regarded as “universal” in its originary location outside of the symbolic. Although the symbolic is itself subject to cultural influence, the process of arriving there, it might be argued, is not.

In re-enacting aspects of this process or journey, through narrative, syntax and context of production, it could be argued that the play addresses aspects of subjectivity, of the state of being human, aspects which transcend cultural or geographical context: a reminder, perhaps, that – on some level – although our houses may appear superficially different, we all, ultimately, live in houses built on mud.

Works Cited

Cultural Transfer, Translation and Reception of Anglophone Drama on Viennese Stages in the 20th Century: The Example of Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf

Introduction

Vienna is one of the main theatre capitals in the world and boasts an especially manifold and lively theatre scene. But the city of Vienna is also a ‘global stage’ where guests from all over the world meet and interact. Since English has become the most important language in the world, it does not come as a surprise that the transfer and reception of originally anglophone plays represent an important contribution to the multiform and cosmopolitan character of Vienna’s theatre scene. During the twentieth century, more than 1,500 British and American plays found their way onto Vienna’s stages in the form of translations, adaptations, or in the original language. On an average, this amounts to approximately 15 plays per year.

The following is a workshop report about a Viennese FWF project which started two years ago and which involves about 15 colleagues concentrating on different authors and subjects. Part I (by Ewald Mengel) will outline the theoretical foundation of this project. Part II (by Margarete Rubik) will give a practical example, concentrating on Viennese versions of Edward Albee’s Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?
Part I: Theory (Ewald Mengel)

Research Goals and Hypotheses

The German title of the project ‘Weltbühne Wien’ has a double meaning: With the help of various cultural studies approaches and methods, our interdisciplinary research project explores processes of cultural transfer and the reception of anglophone plays on Vienna’s stages in the twentieth century. The project focusses on questions relating to cultures in contact and cultural transfer, to circulation and blockage of (foreign) cultural elements, to play selection and censorship, to the role of national stereotypes in the reception process, and to translation and adaptation theory and practice. Further points of interest are the historical role of individual theatres and theatre directors, agents, cultural officers, and other important figures in Vienna’s theatre scene.

All in all, we are analysing the phenomenon of the transference of plays from their source culture into a foreign target culture and attempts at – or resistance against – their ‘naturalisation.’ The transfer of the originally anglophone play constitutes a form of cultural contact or intercultural exchange between Austria and Terranglia, the changing quality of which is to be explored in the context of individual historical periods. A number of hypotheses regarding the interculturality of drama and the role of foreign cultures in constructions of national identities will be put to a practical-analytical test. The project undertakes to examine, reconsider and, eventually, adapt and refine such hypotheses. In our context, this implies an investigation of the effects and repercussions of increased contact with anglophone plays in terms of Austrian cultural as well as national identity in the twentieth century, a century of conflicts and crises. Ultimately, by investigating the transfer and reception of anglophone plays, the project hopes to make an important contribution to the analysis of the processes of cultural transfer and to the history of Viennese theatre and culture.
Theories and Methods

Our theoretical orientation is mainly provided by the theory of cultural transfer which has been developed mainly in France and Germany since the 1980s (Lüsebrink 23) and which incorporates insights and suggestions from ethnology and cultural anthropology, reception theory, translation theory and the study of media cultures (Mitterbauer 23).

According to Lüsebrink, the theory of cultural transfer investigates “processes by which cultural artefacts of various kinds are circulated between cultural spaces.”1 It includes empirical studies of the institutions which are involved in the process of cultural mediation. It also analyses “processes of cultural change, adaptation, mediation and interpenetration”2 (Lüsebrink and Reichardt 20) which are generally characteristic of cultures in contact.

A precondition for such a theory is a constructionist and anti-essentialist concept of culture (Suppanz 21, also see Hall) which perceives culture not as a homogeneous and consistent space governed by a unified value system but as “a place of conflict between representations of world, subject, history, etc.” (Bronfen and Marius 11).3 Culture may be understood as a “signifying or symbolic activity” (Bhabha 210), which is a continuous, dynamic and conflict-laden process in which different groups try to assert their definition of culture at the cost of others. On the one hand, cultural transfer transcends the borderline between ‘self’ and ‘other’ and is therefore principally capable of changing “the ‘given’ forms of interpretation” and calling into doubt the “existing classifications, distances, categorizations” (Suppanz 25).4

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1 “prozessuale Verlaufsformen, durch die kulturelle Artefakte verschiedenster Art zwischen Kulturräumen zirkulieren” (Lüsebrink 27). Since most of the theories quoted above are in German, I have translated them into English in the main text.
2 “Verwandlungs- und Anpassungsprozesse” and “Vermittlungs- und Durchdringungsvorgänge” (Lüsebrink and Reichardt 20).
3 “Ort des Widerstreits zwischen Repräsentation von Welt, Subjekt, Geschichte, usw” (Bronfen and Marius 11).
4 “die gegebenen Interpretationsformen” and “die bestehenden Ordnungen, Abstände, Einteilungen” (Suppanz 25).
the other hand, social groups develop strategies against the transformational powers of cultural transfer which allow them to maintain their identities. "Processes of selection and canonisation"⁵ (Suppanz 25) alike serve the purpose of blockage and ensure that the foreign does not become one’s own (Greenblatt, Marvelous Possessions). Naturally, these processes of selection and canonisation, which amount to blockage, do not only take place between foreign countries but also between different social classes, groups, generations, parties, or ethnicities within one and the same country. The definition of what is ‘our culture’ is the subject of an ongoing dispute or even conflict, so that the process of signifying will never be concluded. The openness of symbolic forms, which results from this conflict, is by no means “a flaw or mistake but [is] the basic quality which enables cultural exchange and the transformation and restructuring of existing cultural orders” (Celestini 38).⁶

Since the cultural artefacts which are exchanged in the course of this transfer are plays, it follows that theatre studies and theatre history, which provide their own theories and methods, are pivotal to this project. With Erika Fischer-Lichte, Semiotik des Theaters, the theatre performance is held to be an act of self-representation and self-reflection of a culture (Fischer-Lichte I, 19). Theatre is a specific form of cultural performance⁷ which shares individual features with other cultural phenomena such as religion or ritual.⁸

Considering the fact that we are not concerned with theatre in an abstract sense but with historically specific forms of theatre, it is important to note that the institution of the theatre is always the

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⁵ “Selektions- und Kanonisierungsvorgänge” (Suppanz 25).
⁶ “Mangel oder Fehler, sondern die grundlegende Eigenschaft, die den kulturellen Austausch sowie die Transformation und Umstrukturierung bestehender kultureller Ordnungen ermöglicht” (Celestini 38). Celestini refers to Michel Foucault's “Vorrede zur Überschreitung” (Preface to Transition).
⁷ Cf. the results and publications of the special research project Kulturen des Performativen at the Free University of Berlin; further: MacAloon 1984; Manning 1983; Schechner 2003.
⁸ Cf. Turner, Anthropology; especially the chapter “Images and Reflections: Ritual, Drama, Carnival, Film, and Spectacle in Cultural Performance”, 21-32.
“ultimate frame of reference which determines the form, shape, and function of drama translations” (Fritz 217). As such, it decides in which form a play reaches the stage. Historically speaking, this referential frame of theatre as an institution is embedded in the social, economic, and political conditions of continually changing historical contexts. In the light of Pierre Bourdieu’s theories, together with other influential factors such as authors, literary agents, critics, etc., all equipped with more or less actual or symbolical capital, the institution of the theatre forms part of the literary field in which it has to strive for, find, or defend its position.

In intra- and intercultural terms, then, cultural encounters of any kind demand, in the most comprehensive sense of the word, translational activities of all parties concerned (Suppanz 26). It follows that culture may legitimately be considered a ‘place of translation’ (Bachmann-Medick 1-7). In this context, modern translation theory becomes relevant, which has continually extended the concept of translation in the direction of cultural encounters in general. Modern translation theory has shown that translation implies much more than just word-by-word equations. Instead, translation is conceived as a bi-cultural encounter and event which presupposes a thorough knowledge of source culture and target culture (Kupsch-Losereit 2).

The theory of drama translation is concerned with more specific problems. An important issue is the fact that, theoretically speaking, we are not dealing with a single translation but with a series of translations which are interlinked in a complex way. The literary (verbal) source text has to be turned into a literary (verbal) target text with stage potential

9 “Bedingungs- und Wirkungsrahmen von Dramenübersetzungen” (Fritz 217).
10 Cf., for example, the results of the University of Göttingen’s special research project (SFB 309) Literarische Übersetzung; Hermans; Snell-Hornby, Translation Studies; more recently: Bassnett.
11 Compare Scollinov and Holland; Fischer-Lichte et al.; Schultze 1990; Bassnett-McGuire; Snell-Hornby, “Bühnenübersetzung.”
Ewald Mengel and Margarete Rubik

At the receiving end, the audience is expected to perform an act of comprehension. At this point, cultural hermeneutics and schema theory become important. On every level of the translation process, hermeneutic acts of understanding and interpreting determine the final shape of the play. This final shape – the result of a series of translations – is identical with the performance itself, which takes place in the presence of the audience. The decision of the audience as to what they have seen again depends on a number of factors which constitute the act of understanding and which are influenced by the audience’s cultural knowledge, their expectations with regard to theatre and specific social, theatrical, and cultural norms and conventions which constitute their schemas of perception.

It is the task of reception theory and reception history to do research into audience response and the impact and influence which the translated play has on the target culture. Since the fleeting impression created by the performance cannot be reconstructed in an objective way, reception history is forced to resort to various historical sources. Among them are reviews in the various media, especially in the newspapers, but also archive material such as personal assets, stage versions of the text, theatre pamphlets, photographic material, or even video or film clips. In each case, the task will be to define the parameters by which the influence of a play on the target culture may be comprehensively described and which also allow statements to be made about the possible transformations and restructurings of the local theatre scene of the target culture.

Part II: Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf in Vienna (Margarete Rubik)

Taking the above theoretical reflections into account, I will review several productions of Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf on major Vienna

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12 Fischer-Lichte, “Inszenierung der Übersetzung” 130, implies that there is a series of consecutive translations, but from the point of view of the integrated approach (Snell-Hornby, Translation Studies), this does not seem to be necessary.

13 A good introduction to this field is Brenner.

stages. A few brief preliminary remarks are meant to hint at general problems encountered in the attempt of translating the play into the target culture. The play is available in two different German translations, an older one by Pinkas Braun (Fischer Verlag 1963), and a newer one by Alissa and Martin Walser (Fischer 1991), which modernises the vocabulary, though not always successfully. In principle, the play presents few major problems for the translator: it contains few puns, and though it is obviously a cultural critique of the United States, most of the references are easily understandable in the target culture. The title itself is of course a real stumbling block. Few Austrians would have known, either in 1964 or later, what to make of this title: most of them would have been unfamiliar not only with the writer Virginia Woolf but also with the Disney movie of the three little pigs which inspired Albee. There is, of course, no remedy for that – short of completely changing the title – and English speaking audiences were probably faced with similar problems of comprehension. Other culture specific comprehension problems could easily be cleared up. For instance, since Warner Brothers was not a well-known studio in 1960s Austria, Brown changed the name to Metro Goldwyn Mayer (2), whose icon, the roaring lion, every child would have known. The Walsers opt for the translation ‘Hollywood-flic’ (“Hollywood Schinken”, 4). In other cases, the directors stepped in to clarify matters, cutting or radically shortening in the opening scene the references to Bette Davis, who was not so well known in Austria as in the English-speaking world. The profusion of swear words necessitated adaptation to the local dialect. Acting versions thus chose the appropriate local variants, to avoid marking the text as explicitly foreign and alien.

Let us now turn to four major Viennese productions. *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* was first performed in Vienna in 1964, one year after the acclaimed first German production (directed by Boris Barlag) in Berlin. The critical controversy about the play in New York (1962) had culminated in the Pulitzer Prize committee’s refusal to award the prize to so ‘filthy’ a play. Given the social and cultural circumstances, it is hardly surprising that it came as a shock to Viennese audiences in 1964.

The theatre scene in Vienna was extremely conservative. Theatre was still regarded as a moral institution expected to provide an uplifting
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experience. There were strict laws against filth and trash (‘Schmutz und Schund’) and censorship against sexually explicit art. The Josefstadt theatre, where the play was performed, had in the past seen a number of prestigious productions of new U.S. plays, but its regular spectators were generally bourgeois, reared on a diet of classics and urbane comedy. Undoubtedly, symbolic capital was to be gained by securing the production rights for a play which had caused an international sensation and a theatre scandal. Prudently, however, the management of the Josefstadt ran the show outside the regular season ticket fare. In view of the play’s obscene language, one critic gasped: “This room, with its noble patina of the most cultivated poetry of world literature had never before heard such off colour expressions” (Obzyna). Reviewers wavered between genuine or pretended shock at Albee’s topic and language and praise for the play’s virtuosity and splendid acting parts. Many attributed the success of the show to the brilliant actors, not the play itself.

Critics in New York and London had, of course, also referred to Albee’s models and predecessors. In Vienna, however, such references acquired a hostile undertone. Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf? was categorised in terms of familiar literary schemata and blamed for its lack of originality: Albee is said to have stolen from Strindberg’s marriage plays, and spiced them up with O’Neill’s alcoholism and Tennessee William’s sexual perversion (Pizzini, “Josefstadt”).

In Vienna, it seems simply outdated, since Strindberg has already illustrated the love-hatred of man and woman often enough, and Tennessee Williams has made

15 The Josefstadt was one of the few Austrian stages in the post-war era which could afford the high copyright-costs for Austrian plays (Eder 143).
16 “dürfen gestern abend wohl die unzweideutigsten Ausdrücke gefallen sein, die in diesem durch die kultivierteste Dichtung der Weltliteratur edel patiniertem Raum je zu hören waren” (Obzyna). All translations of reviews in the paper are my own.
17 “Epigone Albee hat von überall genommen, hat das, was er gierig aus den Werken viel besserer Autoren an sich riß, mit Unrat zusammengekleistert...” (Pizzini, “Josefstadt”)
excesses of drunkenness and sex presentable on stage. Edward Albee has merely augmented his predecessors by additional obscenity.18 (Steiner)

This distinctive anti-American slant must be seen against the background of a widespread dismay of conservative European elites at what was understood as U.S. cultural imperialism, especially as far as popular culture was concerned. Although Austria had received an enormous sum in Marshall plan aid after the war, attitudes towards the United States were divided, fear of “Coca-Colonization” (Wagnleitner) was rife and reviewers felt called upon to defend the superiority of European culture. Post-World War II Austria largely drew its national identity from its century-old cultural tradition,19 and the blockage of supposedly ‘trashy’ overseas influences was a means by which a positive Austrian self-image could be consolidated. Critical arguments against controversial foreign plays often paradoxically blend a rejection of ‘inferior’ American culture with an assertion that Europe had tried out decades ago and long overcome what the Americans were now selling as avant garde. This meant, for instance, castigating Albee’s shock tactics, but asserting in the same breath that the expressionists of the 1920s had used much more revolutionary techniques 50 years ago.

The form and means are striking, though not half so striking as [European] expressionist art of the twenties. [...] We have outgrown not only the (sexual) enlightenment by Strindberg, but also by the expressionists. We are enlightened and may therefore wise in the ways of the world: Just walk past Mr Albee with a shrug, as long as he has no more to offer than this.20 (Pölz)

18 “In Wien findet man es in erster Linie altbacken, denn die Haßliebe zwischen Mann und Frau hat schließlich schon Strindberg eindringlich genug vorgeführt und die Trunkenheits- und Sexexzesse machte Tennessee Williams bühnenfähig. Edward Albee hat seinen Schrittmachern eigentlich nur die gesteigerte Ordinärheit des Ausdrucks hinzugefügt” (Steiner).

19 Cf. Haider-Pregler, “Burgtheater” 113: the major playhouses were understood as visible symbols of the continued imperial power of Austria in cultural life.

20 “Die Form und die Mittel sind kräft, wenn auch noch lange nicht so kräft wie im Expressionismus der zwanziger Jahre. [...] Wir haben nicht nur die Aufklärungsarbeit Strindbergs hinter uns, sondern auch die der Expressionisten. Wir sind aufgeklärt und dürfen daher abgeklärt sein: Vorbeigehen mit einem Schulterzucken an Herrn Albee, solange er uns nicht mehr zu bieten hat als dies” (Pölz).
The play’s critique of America was downplayed in the Josefstadt production itself, which stressed the universal validity of the psycho-drama instead – a typical form of cultural incorporation noticeable in other Viennese productions as well. It was noted with relief that director Moszkowicz had tried to tone down (indeed, some approvingly claimed, to “de-Americanise” [Obzyna]) the play in order to mitigate its brutality. Swear words were not eliminated, but substantial cuts were made especially in the second act, thereby diffusing some of the characters’ insistent malice, their bloodthirsty harping on open wounds. The uncompromising Berlin production was considered unfit for the Austrian temperament. Instead, the play was given a more ‘comfy’ tone in Vienna, as if swamped by the proverbial Austrian “Gemütlichkeit.” “This piece of American college-sloppiness with alcohol excesses” was made to seem “relatively mild” in the Josefstadt and had even “acquired a touch of cosiness.” (Hahnl)21

Hilde Krahl played Martha as an unhappy rather than malicious or libidinous woman (Obzyna), “two rungs above Albee’s original Martha morally”22 (Obzyna). Hans Holt gave George a “spiritual dimension which the author himself never seems to have grasped”23 – as if the production had indeed improved on the text. Holt’s George was resigned rather than weak, shaken by grief, not fury, and he was praised for re-interpreting and domesticating the American tragedy with “Austrian charm” (Walden).

The successful 1968 film version was regarded by many as the definitive version of the play. As a result, no Vienna theatre touched Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf? for seventeen years. In 1981, it was performed by a small fringe theatre, and six years later by another fringe playhouse.

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21 “Seltsam, wie relativ milde Edwar [sic!] Albees brutales Stück […] ausgefallen ist. […] In Wien hat diese amerikanische Collegegeschlamperie mit Alkoholexzessen […] einen Schimmer von Gemütlichkeit bekommen” (Hahnl).

22 “Sie steht moralisch um zwei Stufen höher als die originale Martha...” (Obzyna)

23 “Hans Holt gibt seiner Rolle ein geistiges Volumen, das der Autor selbst nie erfaßt zu haben scheint...” (Ring (?)).
Only in 1991 was Albee’s play taken up by another major theatre – the Burgtheater, the Austrian National theatre. By this time, Claus Peymann was director of the Burgtheater and had opened the house to the avant-garde. Besides, Virginia Woolf had ceased to shock and had metamorphosed into a ‘modern classic’ (Hütter) – canonisation, as Mengel has pointed out earlier in this paper, serving as a convenient means of blockage. The production by Hans Neuenfels saw the return to the Burgtheater stage, after years of absence, of star actor Klaus Maria Brandauer. The first night had to be postponed because of conflicts between the two men. Nonetheless, the production was a great critical success – a foregone conclusion, given the star actors, which also included Neuenfels’ wife Elisabeth Tissenaar as Martha. The true star of the evening, however, turned out to be the young Andrea Clausen as Honey, who was awarded the Kainz medal for the role and went on to become a Burtheater star actress herself.

Staged on a minimalist set fenced in with green marble walls, the production largely seems to have ignored political references and again opted for a psychologising interpretation, trying to unearth the reasons for the characters’ frustration and aggression. Neuenfels started low key: “Only slowly does Neuenfels make the temperature rise in this alcoholic steam bath” (Haider).24 A soft option was taken on characters as well: Brandauer turned George into something like a therapist reluctantly administering the bitter pill of disillusionment to his wife: One reviewer was impressed by the solemnity with which “this supposed loser bears abuse, how he, in all his humiliation, takes up the reigns and in the end confronts his wife with the bitter truth” (Krahl).25 Brandauer’s fight against and for Martha was characterised by both “cruelty and tenderness” (Haider-Pregler, “Psychoterror”).26 The actors

24 “Nur langsam läßt Hans Neuenfels die Betriebstemperatur im Alkoholdampfbad steigen” (Haider).
25 „Wie dieser angebliche Versager die Beleidigungen hinnimmt, wie er in all der Erniedrigung die Zügel ergreift und zuletzt seine Frau mit der bitteren Wirklichkeit konfrontiert, das hat eine starke Getragenheit“ (Krahl).
26 „Sein Kampf gegen und um Martha ist gleichermassen von Grausamkeit und Zärtlichkeit bestimmt...“ (Haider-Pregler, “Psychoterror”).
Ewald Mengel and Margarete Rubik

interpreted their roles with “Christian charity,” thereby introducing hope, but also mendacity (Brandauer). Given such descriptions, few of us would recognize the play, though the acting itself was undoubtedly impressive.

In 1999 the play was staged by the Volkstheater, then run without much artistic success by Emmy Werner. For once, however, the Volkstheater scored a hit. The production was a birthday present for Wolfgang Hübsch, one of the theatre’s actors, who was cast as George. By then, *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf* had become a classic with a certain “patina” (Kathrein). In the programme notes, the Volkstheater, traditionally a left-wing stage, which in Vienna is not identical with an avant garde stage, stressed the political aspects of the play, which “analyses a society held together by the same mechanisms of power and subjection” as the protagonists’ marriage. Only one reviewer, however, picked up on this and saw the American greed for success at the root of the tragedy (Pizzini, “Walpurgisnacht”). For once, however, also the play’s comic potential was released. While British critics have generally stressed this comic strain, Austrian critics tend to regard *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf* as a tragedy and had in the past been confused when audiences laughed – an indication that black comedy is a genre that might suffer in the cultural transfer (a diagnosis also borne out by the fact that director Andrea Breth, evidently feeling uncomfortable with the genre of tragi-comedy or ‘black’ comedy, has recently staged Albee’s *The Goat, Or Who is Sylvia* as a tragedy in the Vienna Akademietheater).

By common consent, pace and timing were just right in the Volkstheater production of 1999. Yet director Harald Clemen in fact made substantial cuts, the most remarkable being the Latin litany

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27 “So kehrt in Albees Hölle Hoffnung ein – und naturgemäß auch die Verlogenheit” (Brandauer).

28 “In seinem berühmten, spannungsgeladenen Schauspiel lotet der amerikanische Bühnenautor Edward Albee auch die Untiefen einer Gesellschaft aus, deren Zusammenhalt durch dieselben Mechanismen von Macht und Unterwerfung gewährleistet wird wie Georges und Marthas Ehe” (Programme notes of the Volkstheater).
George recites while Martha is still speaking about the imaginary son. Under a facade of bourgeois squareness, the actors played out their mean tricks with gusto – though some reviewers complained that they did not go to the full limits of sadism and therefore found the production too harmless (“Evident zu harmlos”) – a surprising critical turn-about. In contrast to the Burgtheater, the Volkstheater had a lavish set, with beautiful furniture, a well-stocked bar, and a Polynesian statue “keeping away all good spirits” (Cerha), as one critic quipped. The setting hinted at a 60s life style without feeling antiquated or nostalgic (“Evident zu harmlos”).

During the Wiener Festwochen 2006, the prize-winning German production by Jürgen Gosch was shown in Vienna. It featured Carinna Harfouch as an uncompromisingly vicious Martha and dispensed with all sentimental alleviation, but introduced substantial cuts in the third act, whose psychology, critics felt, was shaky anyway.

A different approach was chosen by the Volkstheater, when it revived the play again one year later (2007; director: Antoine Uitdehaag) as a vehicle for Maria Bill, a popular actress and chansonneuse and wife of the present artistic director of the theatre, Michael Schottenberg. The set this time consisted of a rotating square with only four armchairs. The square tilted sharply at the end, when Martha and George lost their moorings. The forestage was littered with an enormous collection of bottles. Hair was turned into an important symbol: after the exorcism, a devastated Martha took down her wig – ceasing to playact and in need of comfort from the husband she had tortured. Unlike most earlier productions, this production played the full three hour length.

The show had mixed reviews. Some critics were (I think rightfully) enthusiastic, others felt Bill brayed too much and thus acted in an undifferentiated manner. Again, both Bill and her counterpart Franzmeier were accused of not being sadistic enough. Indeed, much room was given to comedy, and the ‘games’ gave an impression of playfulness rather than sadistic malice, before they got out of hand. Yet the play was not a whit sentimental. Surprisingly, given the present anti-American climate, only one critic pointed at the political dimension of its bitter critique of the American way of life and failure of the American dream (Petsch). All in all, the political aspects were not fore-
grounded and interest was again focused on the universal aspects of human relationships.

Indeed, its reputation now assured, the play is hailed as the “mother of all marriage battles” (Pohl) and Albee as the most important post-war dramatist. As such, however, the play has almost ceased to function in a cultural transfer and has been incorporated into a globalised world culture. In Vienna, *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf* was often removed from its original American context in an attempt to make it meaningful to the target audience. Such a domestication guarantees the play’s success with the broad Viennese audience, but also indicates a widespread resistance in Austrian theatres – or, perhaps, only reviewers? – especially in the first three post-war decades, to challenging ingrained domestic traditions and calling into doubt “existing classifications, distances, categorizations” (Suppanz 25, see also page 3 of this paper) of the host culture. Of course, there have always been innovative theatres and directors who, by staging avant-garde plays, have tried to challenge artistic conservatism. Today, Vienna has a lively, vibrant and multi-faceted theatre scene. However, the writers of this paper have noticed a trend, in the past, towards assimilation rather than engagement with the transformational power of radical dramatic otherness not only in the productions of *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* on major Viennese stages reviewed here. Theatre seems a medium ideally suited for the transfer of and productive engagement with foreign cultural products. However, in Vienna Albee’s play was rather made to function as an act of Austrian self-representation. Several other examples – also in the course of this CDE conference – suggest that this might not infrequently be the fate of foreign plays on local stages all over the world.

Works Cited

*Primary Literature*

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**Secondary Literature**


Programme notes of the Volkstheater. 24 October 1999.


Hysterica and Leah. Adaptations of King Lear from Canada and New Zealand

Introduction

Literary adaptation is the adapting of a literary source to another genre or medium, such as film, a stage play, or even a video game. It can also involve adapting the literary work in the same genre, just for different purposes, e.g. to work with a smaller cast or for a different demographic group, such as adapting a story for children. An adapted work appeals to a writer or producer because it gains his/her interest or because it has become popular. The encounter with the work simply sparks off the imagination as to its possible application in a different way.

Linda Hutcheon argues in her recent study A Theory of Adaptation that every live staging of a printed play could theoretically be considered an adaptation in its performance (cf. Hutcheon 39). Staging a play as an adaptation? Plays are written not for individual readers to read, but for actors to perform and for audiences to see and listen to. Whereas a published novel is the end product of a creative process, a written play is but an intermediate stage in the process. The play text is a blueprint, is like a (musical) score which asks for extrapolation, for completion. Staging is endemic, as it were, to the printed text. An unperformed play text is a truncated play. Staging is part and parcel of playwrighting (‘wright,’ as in ‘cartwright’ literally means ‘to make,’ ‘fabricate,’ ‘produce’). As long as the playwright’s text – the dialogue, the monologue, the characters – remains as it is in its performance, the term ‘adaptation’ would be a misnomer for ‘staging.’

What happens in what is termed ‘adaptation’ is that its author starts from the original as a starting point, a foil, a ‘foreground’ from which he
or she departs in this or that direction. He/she may disregard this or that character, replace a male character by a female one or *vice versa*. He/she may topicalise the issues of the original or re-situate the content by embedding it into a contemporary context.

In the so-called New English Cultures writers of adaptations tend to take up well-known and popular European classics and ‘write back.’ The specific reworking may be a re-situating, re-tooling or revisioning of the original (cf. Glaap 85-6). Over the past three decades, Canada has had a long history of production and reception of Shakespeare’s plays. Canadian adaptations of his plays have become increasingly popular and can truly be considered significant expressions of contemporary Canadian identity as they start from the Bard’s plays and address topics and issues like nationalism, separatism, feminism, post-colonialism, and cultural appropriation. The adaptation of Shakespeare in Canada “links colonial heritage with canonical authority, but that authority can then be turned, in what Northrop Frye calls ‘interpenetration’ […], to advantage in a revisionary neo-colonial context” (Fishlin 314). “The problem of Shakespeare’s ironic centrality to critical thinking generally,” writes Fishlin, “has a particular relevance in a national entity like Canada, still dealing with a colonial legacy and the effects of a less-than-complete decolonization” (Fishlin 313).

Turning works of fiction into stage plays has almost become a tradition in Canadian theatre. Jane Urquart’s *The Whirl Pool* (1986) was adapted by Brian Quirt; Margaret Laurence’s *The Stone Angel* (1964) was produced at Canadian Stage in 1999; Margaret Atwood’s *The Edible Woman* (1965) was rewritten for the stage by Dave Carley (2002), and Michael Lewis MacLennon’s *Life After God: The Play* (2006) goes back to the short story of the same title by Douglas Coupland with additional inspiration from Coupland’s book *City of Glass* (2003). These are but four examples.

The question whether these appropriations highlight the universal dimension of Shakespeare’s plays or rather denounce it in the focus on cultural specificity can ultimately only be answered by the writers themselves. But most probably, some of them start from the assumption that Shakespeare’s plays are primarily about universal issues exemplified with reference to specific people or events. With their adaptations,
Canadian writers want to demonstrate the relevance of the Bard’s plays to the present time or their living contexts. Vice versa, others – with current situations, crises and events in minds – look out for a Shakespeare play that might lend itself to problematising general issues and universal dimensions behind what contemporary authors are confronted with. Here, the Shakespeare play is not the starting point for writing an adaptation, it is rather an ‘envelope’ for what they are confronted with. Considering an adaptation to be merely a box office vehicle seems not to do justice to contemporary writers.

Since 1970, Shakespeare’s plays, in particular, have increasingly become springboards for Canadian adaptations and rewritings, which mirror diverse approaches. In some cases, the Shakespeare play has been transported into specifically Canadian surroundings. The Blizzard by Dawn Davis and Eric Epstein (Nakai Theatre, Whitehorse, 1991), a take on The Tempest, is set in a northern climate with aboriginal content. Ken Mitchell’s Cruel Tears (Persephone Theatre, Saskatoon, 1975) is a regionalist revision of Othello, “a country opera.” Other rewritings are based on more than one of the Bard’s works – Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet) by Ann Marie MacDonald (Nightwood Theatre, Toronto, 1988), for instance. Suddenly Shakespeare by Kim Selody (Carousel Theatre, Vancouver, 1988) addresses young audiences. Djanet Sears’ Harlem Duet (Taragon Extraspace, Toronto, 1997) is a non-chronological prelude to Othello, a prequel, as it were, to the story which is located in Harlem, in an all-black context. Michael O’Brien’s play Mad Boy Chronicle (Alberta Theatre Project, Calgary, 1995) is a witty retooling of a classic, not only inspired by Shakespeare but also by the Danish tale of revenge as told in the Gesta Danorum by Saxo Grammaticus in 1200 AD.¹

This essay focuses on two adaptations of King Lear. Michael McKinnie, with reference to Susan Bennett (1996), points to the fact that:

King Lear has been subject to a number of high-profile ‘radical’ interpretations and adaptations throughout western theatre that ‘occupy a tense yet sometimes generative relation to their Ur-text’ (Bennett 48). [...] King Lear has become a

¹ For more details, cf. Glaap, in: Schaffeld. The part of this current article dealing with Hysterica is a revised excerpt of the quoted essay.
key site where the tension between a universalist cultural conservation and an imminent cultural subversion is performed in contemporary Western theatre practice. (Brydon/Makaryk 212-213)

The adaptations to be discussed here are less well-known – one from Canada, the other from New Zealand. They are adaptations across the gender boundaries. *Hysterica, Or To Have To Hold* is a Canadian project developed in 1990 by Richard Rose, currently artistic director at the Tarragon Theatre in Toronto. *Leah*, by New Zealand playwright Geraldine Brophy, was commissioned by the New Zealand Festival of the Arts in 2000 and performed in Wellington.

**The Lear Project – Hysterica**

In a recent project, Toronto’s Necessary Angel Theatre Company and its then director Richard Rose employed the techniques of workshop exploration and collective creation to take the original Shakespearean *King Lear* and use it as a framework against which contemporary Canadian issues may be explored. While the bones of the original play remain, Rose relocates this gender-bent version of the story, titled *Hysterica*, and the issues it raises, to a specifically Canadian setting. As the title of Robert Cushman’s review of the 2000 production puts it: “This is a Lear who has read Lear” (Cushman).

In cooperation with DD Kugler, Rose started off from working from the 1623 Folio and the 1608 Quarto notes of Skip Shand and staged a production of Shakespeare’s *King Lear* entitled *The Tragedie of King Lear* in 1995. The four principal male roles were taken by women, Lear himself being played by Janet Wright, while the part of Goneril, Lear’s most treacherous daughter, was given to a male actor.

This production formed the first step in Rose’s Lear project, which brought considerable acclaim and success to Toronto’s Necessary Angel Theatre Company in the 1990s and to Rose, its artistic director. The second step was a production, directed by Rose, of *Seven Lears: The Pursuit of the Good* – the English playwright Howard Barker’s take on the events of Lear’s life before he becomes the old man we meet in Shakespeare. Although he has been conducting a long-standing steamy affair with Prudentia, it is her daughter, Clarissa, whom the young Lear marries and who is the mother of his children in Barker’s play. It is she
who, in the words of the subtitle of the play, represents the ‘pursuit of the good.’ But, as the action progresses, truth, honesty and goodness are shown to be relative terms, and the play ends in a bloodbath. Clarissa murders her own mother Prudentia, and Lear revenges the killing of his mistress by murdering his wife Clarissa. As Richard Rose writes in a leaflet he prepared of his production of Seven Lear:

Barker’s Lear is caught between governing a kingdom, the pursuit of good and the irrationality of human nature and desire. The play seeks to explain why there is no mention of Lear’s wife in the Shakespearean original, which explores Lear’s folly and his elder daughter’s thanklessness. (Taylor, “Postmodern Work Puts Lear on the Couch”)

While Barker’s play deals with a Lear who is young and still married, Hysterica (2000), a collective creation also directed by Richard Rose, centres around a Lear who is elderly and female. The title is derived from the Shakespearean play, in which Lear, feeling himself on the brink of madness, cries: “O! How this mother [hysteria] swells up toward my heart; Hysterica Passio! Down you climbing sorrow” (II, 4, 56-57). The focal point of this reworking of the Lear story is schizophrenia, defined by Rose as “the separation of thought and action” (Friedlander). He sees the play as being “not so much about madness or hysteria, but how one gets there.” It explores “relationships, what happens when a family mistakes loving for having” (Crew).

To Rose, the Lear story deals with a very up-to-date issue, considering the baby-boom generation dealing with aging parents. Rose’s central concern was to place the issues raised in the Shakespearean play in a contemporary Canadian context. “I wanted to look at the play through a Canadian eye. Here is a woman torn from her past, [who has emigrated to Canada from Greece and] who favours one son over the other, and, as a result, creates a split between good and evil” (Friedlander). Indeed, Hysterica is a collectively-created Canadianised version of King Lear. It was developed by the individual members of the cast who, under Rose’s guidance, were asked to contribute scenes to the play, which were then discussed and revised by the other members of the team. While their input, which reflected their experiences as Canadians, was initially unrelated to the original King Lear, it provided the impulses on which
the new version of the play was built. Thus *Hysterica* is “anchored in the play and yet quite different” (Friedlander).

The central character of *Hysterica* is Mama Leda (Leda was the daughter of King Thestius and the mother of Helen of Troy). In the Canadian play, Leda (= Lear) is the president of a financial holding company. To test the love of her two sons, Edward and Iain, she gives each a 45 percent stake in the family business, keeping a ten percent controlling interest for herself, in the belief that she can play one son off against the other. When Leda calls upon her two sons to declare their love for her, Edward, totally unscrupulous and false, pays her a fulsome tribute which his mother duly rewards by giving him the key to the safety deposit box containing her power of attorney. Iain, an artist and a dreamer, who prefers to work at sculpture in his studio rather than be involved in the business, remains silent. However, Iain’s wife, Gwen, the fourth character in the play, turns out to be as scheming and unprincipled as Edward.

Thus, while Leda clearly represents Lear, with a business rather than a country to divide among her heirs, direct parallels with other figures in Shakespeare’s play are more difficult to draw. It is tempting to see Edward as an amalgam of Goneril and Regan, but for Cushman, Edward and Iain may be seen “as the ugly sisters Goneril and Regan between whom Lear divided his power” (Cushman). The emotional brutality of the action is intensified by the absence from *Hysterica* of any equivalent of the ‘good’ figures in the original – Cordelia, or the sub-plot characters Gloucester, Edgar and Edmund. As the critic Taylor puts it: “*Hysterica* […] has eliminated redeeming characters like the unjustly persecuted Edgar and his blinded father Gloucester, and left the audience with a picture of unmitigated selfishness and neurosis that makes watching hard” (Taylor, “Family Disfunction Does Not The Bard Make”).

The division of the business and the power of attorney are the central elements of the plot. Edward and Iain undertake to look after their parent in her reclining years. But when Leda needs a home while work is being done on her house, Iain shows no inclination to take her and regards her fate with indifference. She finds herself having to suffer abominable treatment at the hands of her daughter-in-law Gwen. Leda’s
bitterness increases further when she is put into an old people’s home. In the meantime, the scheming Gwen is having an affair with Edward and cynically attempts to ingratiate herself with Leda by claiming to be expecting a child. Leda, who is desperate for her grandchild, finally succumbs to this emotional blackmail and relinquishes her controlling interest in the firm. This triggers the final disintegration of a family in which loving has been replaced by giving. Edward loses his mind, and Leda, “an outrageous character of massive ego [...],” is taken toward “a genuinely frightening collapse” (Taylor, “Family Disfunction Does Not The Bard Make”).

What are the specifically Canadian elements which, using the framework of Shakespeare’s towering comedy, have gone into building a grotesque, bitter modern comedy on contemporary greed and emptiness? The tension between Leda, a first-generation Greek immigrant, and her two sons, both born and bred in Canada, is typical of many Canadian families. There is a conflict of values. For Rose himself, the story contains parallels with his direct personal experience – his parents are elderly and in need of care, his mother, an immigrant from Venezuela. As one reviewer saw it, “the Baby-Boom generation [...] has recently decided that King Lear is really about the problems of what to do with your old folks” (Cushman). In the words of Richard Rose: “King Lear could be a tale from our own times: grasping middle-aged children battle for their inheritance while bickering about who will care for their increasingly senile parent” (in: Taylor, “Family Disfunction Does Not The Bard Make”).

In Hysterica, Richard Rose and his company were able to use the Lear story as a foundation on which to create a bitter domestic comedy. The stark inhumanity of the Shakespearean original gives way to a warped and jaundiced examination of the range of contradictory emotions that family in a ‘post-modern’ society like contemporary Canada can engender.

The actress who played Leda, Maria Vagratsis, though both she and her brothers are Canadian by birth, is herself the daughter of Greek parents who had emigrated to Windsor in the 1950s. For her, the work on Hysterica represented a spur to re-examine the heritage she had tended to reject as a girl. As she states: “Now that I know more of my
history, I am not trying to deny it any more [...]. I am a Canadian, but with another entire reservoir of things to draw on” (Crew).

A New Zealand King Lear – Leah

The concept of the play Leah was developed by Geraldine Brophy, and the adaptation was written by her and Simon Bennett. Brophy, in an e-mail to the author dated 14 December 2007, wrote: “To my knowledge King Lear has been played by several women around the world, but always as an old woman within the context of the male world or by an actress playing a man.” Like Hysterica, Leah has changed the patriarchal world of Shakespeare’s King Lear to a matriarchal world. The play is a provocative interpretation of the Bard’s play. It reflects the situation in New Zealand, where “women hold most of the constitutional positions of power,” as stated in a leaflet from the New Zealand Actors Company.

Lear/Leah, in Brophy’s play, is a 40-year-old fighting female who rages against the heavens and rolls on the floor with the Fool. Leah is rooted in what Brophy in her e-mail calls “the warrior queen societies.” Males cannot inherit, and all key power is held by fighting women. Leah is mother of three sons.

Brophy’s re-writing of King Lear tries to achieve ‘equivalence in difference’ by preserving the text, but develops it in a gender-bent version. The name Leah reminds us of the Biblical Leah in Genesis 29. She was the older of Laban’s two daughters, the other was Rachel. “Leah’s eyes were clouded, but Rachel was fair in face and form,” we read in Genesis 29.17. Jacob, the son of Laban’s sister, was in love with Rachel. He promised that he would be Laban’s servant for seven years for the sake of Rachel. But after the seven years, Laban did not give Leah to Jacob (23). His reason for doing this was: “In our country we do not let the younger daughter be married before the older” (26). When Jacob complained about this, Laban gave him Rachel in addition, if he (Jacob) worked for another seven years.

Contrasting the Dramatis Personae of the Shakespeare play and of this adaptation elucidates how the male characters have been replaced by females:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shakespeare. King Lear</th>
<th>Brophy. Leah</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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Adaptations of King Lear from Canada to New Zealand

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>New Zealand Equivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lear, King of Britain</td>
<td>Leah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duke of Burgundy</td>
<td>Duchess of Burgundy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duke of Cornwall, Husband to Regan</td>
<td>Duchess of Cornwall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duke of Albany, Husband to Goneril</td>
<td>Duchess of Albany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earl of Kent</td>
<td>Kent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earl of Gloucester</td>
<td>Countess of Gloucester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edgar, Son to Gloucester</td>
<td>Edgnar, Daughter to Gloucester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oswald, Steward to Goneril</td>
<td>Oswald, Steward to Goneril</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fool</td>
<td>Fool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regan</td>
<td>Gonerill, Leah’s oldest son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cordelia</td>
<td>Cordelius, Leah’s youngest son</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are details in the play which reveal Brophy’s overall concept: it foregrounds teenage-hood, pregnancy and the menopause; these can bring about chemical changes in the mind and body and alter behaviours significantly. Brophy explains in her e-mail: “Lear’s sudden madness and aberrant behaviour, usually laid on the doorstep of senility from advanced age, [here] begins to unfold another more complicated dimension.” From a warrior queen’s perspective, nurture, loss of physical power and emotional rupture come into play and work very well.

After all, in New Zealand, since the 1990s, every major political role and corporate charge seemed to be headed by women in their middle years, who were referred to as “warrior queens.” In her play, Geraldine Brophy, who played the role of Leah herself, offers a powerful perspective on the warrior queens and how they act, in often brutal ways, in high pressure situations. The New Zealand Actors Company, in the aforementioned leaflet, states that “Leah is about parents and children, land corruption and morality. It acknowledges the power of evil and human frailty, while also asserting the spiritual values that give meaning to life.” Another phenomenon, which is also part of the context in
which Brophy’s play was developed, is the proliferation of women committing violent acts upon children, which elicited consternation among New Zealand society. The specifically New Zealand elements are not as such thematised in *Leah*, yet the allusions to them are obvious.

Geraldine Brophy, in her e-mail, admits that she “was always intrigued by the seemingly motiveless line at the end of the play [*King Lear*] following the famous five ‘nevers’”:

> And my poor fool is hang’d! No, no, no life!  
> Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,  
> And thou no breath at all? Thou’lt come no more,  
> Never, never, never, never, never!  
> Pray you, undo this button: thank you, Sir.  
> Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips,  
> Look there, look there! [*Dies.*] (V, 3, 305-11)

The line “Pray you, undo this button” has been interpreted in different ways. In his commentary in the Arden Shakespeare Kenneth Muir writes: “Lear feels a sense of suffocation, and imagines it is caused by the tightness of his clothes. J.W. Harvey suggests to me that Lear is referring to one of Cordelia’s buttons; but I think this is unlikely” (footnote 309). In Bradley’s view (footnote 310), Lear dies of joy, believing Cordelia to be alive (cf. Shakespeare 218). Geraldine Brophy writes about the character of the Fool in her play:

> The Fool [...] may have fathered her last and most beloved child. She was a violent and flawed picture of successful womanhood. A monarch who was less majestic than human. [...] In my *Leah*, she undoes her bodice and the barren queen attempts to breast-feed life back into the dead adult child. (e-mail)

“As Shakespeare’s story was from the Celtic culture [her own], most notably *King Lear,*” writes Brophy, “I felt we would be at home with the warrior queen societies for the concept to rest within.” Some words and phrases changed in this adaptation have been gleaned from pagan lore and matriarchal religious symbolism.

Whether or not the theatre-going public in New Zealand is ready for a 40-year-old woman covered in blood, raging against the heavens and rolling on the floor with The Fool is a moot point.

*Coda*
Adaptations of King Lear from Canada to New Zealand

While *Hysterica*, a Canadianised adaptation of Shakespeare’s play, deals with a very current issue, the young generation and their aging parents, *Leah* is rooted in what Brophy calls “the warrior queen societies.” The central characters’ names are Leah and Leda. Leah is a reference to the biblical Leah in the Book of Genesis. Leda reminds us of Leda in Greek mythology who was admired by Zeus, who raped her in the disguise of a swan.

The juxtaposition of a few details illustrates the main difference between the two adaptations discussed here:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leah</th>
<th>Hysterica</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leah, a “warrior queen”</td>
<td>Leda, president of a financial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gender-bent version</td>
<td>gender-bent version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand context:</td>
<td>Canadian context:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“warrior queens”</td>
<td>immigrants as parts of the Canadian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>women committing violent acts</td>
<td>establishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on children</td>
<td>relationships – mistaking loving for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>close adherence to Shakespeare’s text – a few cuts</td>
<td>giving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>re-writing</td>
<td>Baby boom generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a four-person version/some Shake-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>spearean characters omitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>adaptation/collective creation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Brophy’s *Leah* preserves the text, if in a gender-bent version, and this with a blend of emotions fermented inside a play about a forty-year-old woman, who is aggressive and violent. Richard Rose has created a “Canadian” Lear. In *Hysterica*, King Lear is a foil to a discussion of contemporary Canadian issues, also in a gender-bent version. The basic idea of the original remains, but Rose relates the Lear story to a specifically Canadian context. “Michael McKinney,” writes Irena R. Makaryk, “studies the issues of cross-casting and its role in transforming the on-stage relationship between the sex of the actor, the gendering of the characters, the spectator and the text within the specific political framework of conservative Premier Mike Harris’s Ontario” (Makaryk 31). And theatre critic Kate Taylor – with reference to the Canadian
production of Howard Barker’s *Seven Lears* – compares this play with Shakespeare’s play, thereby opening a discussion of another facet of adaptations of *King Lear*:

Shakespeare followed an old Lear from foolish sanity to wise madness, Barker follows a younger Lear from precocious intelligence to addled tyranny. Shakespeare’s King Lear is the story of a king who becomes a man, Barker’s Lear is the story of a boy who becomes a king. King Lear knew too little; this Lear knows too much and uses his great, cluttered mind to snuff out his flickering conscience. (Taylor, “Postmodern Work Puts Lear on the Couch”)

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VI. APPENDIX:
AUTHORS ON ADAPTATION
DAVID ELDREDGE

Adaptation:
A Way of Going on by Other Means

David Eldridge is one of the most distinguished British playwrights of his generation. Born in Romford, Essex, in 1973, he began writing full-time after graduating in English Literature and Drama from Exeter University in 1995 – he has received an Honorary Doctorate in 2007. Eldridge has said that his professor, Peter Thomson, gave him the confidence to write his first play. Thomson has recalled that, 

“[e]ven when he [David Eldridge] tried to act like an actor, he acted like a playwright. He was always trying to own the words, rather than parroting them. And he was very quick to learn that a real writer not only writes, but rewrites.”

In 1996, his *Serving It Up* was one of the plays in the London Fragments season for which the Bush Theatre was awarded a Time Out Live Award. In 1997, he was Pearson TV playwright in Residence at the Royal National Theatre. In 2001, *Under the Blue Sky* was awarded the Time Out Live Award for Best New Play in the West End. *Under the Blue Sky* received its American Premiere at the renowned Williamstown Theatre Festival, Massachusetts, in June 2002, and was first produced on the West Coast of the United States at the Geffen Playhouse in Los Angeles in September 2002. It seems as if it is one of the rare plays to

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1 The following essay is based on a transcript of David’s talk and, therefore, represents the original, oral format.

enter the repertory stage, with a revival at the Duke of York’s Theatre in 2008. Eldridge is probably best known for his play *Market Boy* (2006). It was the first play by a young playwright to be produced on the large Olivier stage in the Royal National Theatre under Nicholas Hytner as artistic director of the National.

Aleks Sierz wrote about Eldridge’s works: “*Summer Begins* (Donmar, 1997) and *Falling* (Hampstead, 1999) are perfect accounts of the hopes and anxieties of daily life, while his 2000 Royal Court play, *Under the Blue Sky*, demonstrates his wicked sense of humour. In 2004, he produced a cracking version of *Festen* (Almeida, and West End) and another moving account of family life, *M.A.D.* (Bush). In 2005, Eldridge continued to use the family as a focal point for his work, and experimented in writing from a subjective point of view, in *Incomplete and Random Acts of Kindness* (Royal Court). Active member of the Monsterists: in 2006, his *Market Boy* was an outstanding Monster success on the National’s huge Olivier stage. He’s also a fine adapter of Ibsen.”

My talk this morning is called “Adaptation: A Way of Going on by Other Means.” The title defines what I want to talk about because I don’t think it’s particularly interesting to have a playwright like me here pose a theory about adaptation. I feel that that is your job. It seems to me that the best contribution I can make is to share a bit of knowledge about the adaptation of the Dogme movie *Festen* that I have worked on in the theatre – to talk about how it came about and how I worked on it, and then to offer some thoughts about what that might mean in terms of the working life of the playwright and how some of that might influence and be a part of the corpus of the original work.

It was just a few weeks ago that I went to see Simon Stephens’s new play at the National Theatre and I know Simon Stephens is extremely popular in Germany, of which I am extremely envious. He does a lovely interview in the program with the playwright, critic, and academic Dan

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Rebellato. It is a very good context placer for what I am going to talk about. Simon says: “When I’m writing, I like to be inspired or infuriated by other people’s work. While I was writing *Harper Regan*, I said to Nicholas Hytner, the director of the National Theatre, ‘you know some of my work, who do you think I should read?’ He suggested *Euripides*. So I read fifteen of his plays in a full night to stoke up the oven of my imagination.” My play, *Under the Blue Sky*, produced at the Royal Court in 2000, was for me a play that saw me somehow shift out of the subset that was called ‘the promising playwright’ into another one just called ‘playwright.’

One of the things that happened was that about a year later, just prior to September 11th, when I was at Stansted Airport, waiting to go through Departures, I got a phone call from a producer named Marla Rubin. She asked me if I knew the film *Festen* and she mentioned that she was thinking of doing an adaptation of this film. I said, “Do I know it? It is one of my favourite contemporary films!” It was like Christmas had come early. She said that she had seen my play *Under the Blue Sky* and that it was one of her favourite plays of the last few years and that she would love to have me look at the film again. I think the adaptation largely started at the moment when she met the Dogme filmmakers at a party. She had this passionate belief that it could just be a play. I became obsessed and preoccupied with this phone call as I was sitting in the plane. I thought, ‘Oh God, I must be a playwright rather than being a promising playwright.’ What immediately struck me about it was, just in very simple, practical terms, that it really might be a play.

The action in *Festen* is very contained; it is situated in one place. It’s contained over a prescribed period of time and it observes the formalities and rituals of the 60th birthday party. It has a very clear action with a central protagonist, Christian, who, with a Hamlet-like action, tries to infuse and force his family to accept the truth of the pain of the abuse in the family and the suicide of his sister. So there is very clear central action. My mind immediately began to race and, when I was meeting up with Marla Rubin, my sense of ego inflated like a hot air balloon as I had fantasies and delusions of grandeur about how I might begin to work on this great film. Of course that balloon was deflated when it became clear within about two minutes that I was the second choice as playwright.
There's actually a serious point within this in that they tried to make the project work with another playwright. When I began to talk to Marla about it, there suddenly seemed to be a stampede of elephants in the room. The makers of *Festen*, the director/writer, Thomas Vinterberg, and his co-writer, Mogens Rukov, had some rules in terms of how another writer might work on their material.

The first rule that they set was that any adaptor cannot add material. I thought to myself, “What?” The second rule was that the writer/adaptor could make cuts to the screenplay. In addition to that, there couldn’t be any reordering. So, they want to hire me, although I’m not allowed to do any creative work; I’m only allowed to cut and I’m not allowed to reorder. So, why didn’t they just hire an editor? What became clear very quickly was that there was a massive gulf in cultural sensibilities and different theatre cultures in a sense that, what Thomas and Mogens understood, was a notion of the director as auteur, doing an adaptation in a production. In fact, there had been a theatre production of *Festen* in Poland and there had been another one in Germany and they both had been successful in a setup where essentially the director, as auteur, was the adapter. They deconstructed the film and the film’s screenplay in their production. But what Thomas and Mogens didn’t understand was the notion that, in the English tradition, the writer might do that, while the director just directs the play. They couldn’t get over that. It’s just the writer who does the adaptation in the U.K., not necessarily the director.

I said to Marla, “look, as much as I would love to do this – I love the film and I believe it would be a wonderful play – I don’t want to do this. I don’t want to be a glorified editor. All they want is an English name on the tin so it can get staged.” Marla said that she agreed with me and proposed that we work with the guys so that we could breach the cultural gap. We got into a figurative dance that lasted about nine months, during which I began to think seriously about how I might adapt the film for the theatre and commit some of those ideas to paper. What I arrived at is that I thought about a moment in the film, a moment in the middle of the night when the 60th birthday starts to break up and there’s dancing. At this point the filmmaking itself becomes highly experiential. It begins to reflect some of the emotional states in ques-
tion. The story begins almost to break down and there is a moment in the film involving Christian when the camera is almost taking the point of view of his dead sister, Linda, and it almost seems as if she steps out from behind the camera and he glimpses her.

I was very inspired by that because it made me feel that the form of the play ought to be really expressive, that the way the story is told should communicate some of the meaning of this film. I was very inspired, actually, by Sarah Kane’s *Blasted* and the way the form of that play profoundly carries some of its meaning. I started to think about what is happening to Christian's gut. I thought about the arrival, in the first third of the film up until we get the family around the table, and his emotional state: he knows what he is going to do. He is going to turn up to this dinner and he is going to deliver his speech, which is going to take a great courage. Keeping in mind the sense of people arriving, I then started to think about the play’s episodic form at the beginning – essentially overlapping dialogues that appear in daisy-chain form.

As you arrive in scene two, Christian meets his dad and his mother. Then his stomach and bollocks tighten up and the play tries to mirror this feeling of nervousness. By the time of the bedroom sequence – which is a technical challenge because how do you achieve, in the theatre, these three simultaneous bedroom scenes – the play overlaps and knots up like his stomach. We get to dinner, and then once dinner breaks up, the form of the play also breaks up. The play begins to fragment and then literally comes apart – certainly in Rufus Norris' production, where, due to all of the temporal separations, the play is completely fragmented by the end. There is a bed and chairs on the stage and everything is broken down. So all of this was brewing up nicely.

I did my first draft and went to Copenhagen to see Mogens and Thomas. Due to a film project, Thomas couldn’t be present to discuss the draft. I instead met only with Mogens. In the meeting, he took the first draft and flung it on the table and said that “this isn’t *Festen*, it’s an incest play.” I realized, that to go on, I had to own the screenplay. We had a glorious argument that lasted three hours. What was great about it was that – once we got through the morass of the two men’s egos, which was why the argument was worth it, there was a lot of stuff about feeling defensive and, from their [Vinterberg and Rukov’s] side, much
about being protective of their work, as they should be, rightly – the
really fantastic note within the argument was when Mogens said that
“I’ve read your work. I’ve done my homework. You, as a playwright, are
a meticulous builder; everything has its place. There is a cause and effect
for everything, and, very discreetly and subtly, this is what you have
done to Festen in hundreds of tiny ways. In Festen, a character might
one day go left or they may go right. There is no logic for how it all
works.”

We had a moment of rapprochement and then we just started to talk
about Harold Pinter. This enormously ugly and bloody afternoon
turned out to be quite a beautiful meeting. It was there where I realized
why he called my play an incest play. He said that, where everything
related to the plot) has a reason and a cause-and-effect type of logic,
then it, in Festen, can only irreducibly come back to incest and sexual
abuse. But actually Festen is also about other things as well. I went on
ahead with a second draft, but Mogens found it difficult to continue
because he had felt that he had done his bit. Thomas [Vinterberg],
having just finished filming, took over the discussions. They were funny
because the two of them said such different things regarding my drafts.
Thomas turned out to be much more pragmatic. If Mogens was the
heart of the project, Thomas felt he was the pragmatist; he had very
interesting, practical notes about the storytelling and the structure of
the play.

Once it had gone through three of four more drafts, it wasn’t a par-
ticularly difficult play to get on in London. There was much competi-
tion for the staging of the play. We sent it to the Donmar Warehouse
Theatre, to the Almeida Theatre – where it was performed – and to the
Young Vic and all were very keen on staging the play. In the production
itself, there were some significant things we did in the adaptation text
and rehearsal process but the adaptation was not done in the rehearsal
room. I remember there were two significant areas that we looked at in
the play and in the rehearsal process which were, not surprisingly, the
areas that I thought about early in the writing process. That is, what
form should the play have, what does that mean, and what is going on in
Christian’s gut? And that is the bedroom scene where we have three
overlapping scenes that go on simultaneously reflecting the knot in his stomach.

We discovered quite quickly that what I had written was unstageable. I can remember the read-through; everyone was quite excited, but once the actors got to their feet, it was unstageable. Through a lot of the rehearsal process, there was much re-jigging of the text that went hand in hand with how the text might be staged. The other area we looked at was the other side of dinner. It all comes apart; the temporal and spatial realities begin to melt. I thought that this coming-apart would happen later. I was looking at a moment that was equivalent to a moment in the film. The director of the stage production, however, was a very persuasive arguer and he explained that, with the logic of the production of my adaptation, it has to come apart when dinner breaks up. He was exactly right.

In a way, there was a weird fidelity to the film at that point which wasn’t serving the logic of what I had done and what we were doing. I thought that it is very interesting how some things happen in life. I was obviously very anxious about what Mogens and Thomas would think. I think it was either the first or second preview of Festen when Mogens suffered a heart attack, and there was a small part of me that thought I was responsible for it. But Mogens and Thomas were very pleased. In the end, I think that, despite their opening motives, their notion that I was just to be a function really, that helped them get their show on, they really loved the work. A time after the premiere at a party in the West End, Mogens Rukov gave a speech. In the mood of Festen, he stood up and tapped his glass; he came to me, and said: “You know, three years ago, if they had sold Uzis in Copenhagen this man would be dead. But he has given me Festen and for that I am very thankful.” Without extrapolating too much, it is a pointer to see how fraught the relationships in the adaptation process can be.

As much as working on Festen was a difficult process, on occasion, I do feel that I have learned an awful lot from Mogens Rukov and Thomas Vinterberg. There was a strong feeling that, coming back to my opening quotation from Simon Stephens, somehow there is an engagement, that if I can find a way of engaging with, actively, another mind or great imagination – with a great craftsman like Henrik Ibsen, for example –
that I might be able to stroke my own imagination, and that it might be something interesting, inspiring, and not the least fuel for my own work.
Polly Teale in Conversation

Polly Teale is Artistic Co-Director of the acclaimed Soho-based theatre company Shared Experience. Shared Experience, founded by Mike Alfreds in 1975, is at the forefront of British theatre companies specialising in adaptations of classics. According to the Guardian’s theatre critic Lyn Gardner, it “is Shared Experience which has disproved the notion that when it comes to adaptations there is no getting away from the book.” Their distinctive style of merging text-based theatre with an expressionist aesthetic based on the physical presence of actors has earned the company a unique place in the contemporary British theatre scene. Teale has recalled how witnessing a Shared Experience performance in her school canteen set her off on her theatrical career path. Having acted in school, she switched to writing and directing while studying at Manchester University. She has described the excitement she felt when Nancy Meckler invited her to join Shared Experience as Associate Director in 1994. She has worked frequently in close collaboration with both Meckler and Helen Edmundson. Teale is married to the former Artistic Director of the Royal Court Theatre, Ian Rickson.

Polly Teale’s greatest success so far has been After Mrs Rochester, her 2003 adaptation of Jean Rhys’s novel Wide Sargasso Sea (published by Nick Hern Books). She won the prize for best director at the 2003 Evening Standard Theatre Awards for her staging at the Duke of York’s Theatre. The production went on to win the Time Out Live Award 2004 for Best Production in the West End and received two TMA Award nominations, the Opus Award for Best Touring Production and the nomination of Sarah Ball for Best Supporting Actress. Teale also directed The House of Bernarda Alba (1998) and Jane Eyre (1996, a collaboration with Young Vic and Wolsey Theatre Ipswich). War and

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**ECKART VOIGTS-VIRCHOW:** Could you tell me about the origins of Shared Experience?

**POLLY TEALE:** It is quite a long time ago, about 30 years. It was founded by the director Mike Alfreds. I saw a lot of his work because I grew up in Sheffield and that was a place where they opened a lot of their early shows, strangely enough. It was real actor’s theatre in that they had no set, no costumes, no lighting. It was all about what the actors could conjure up with their bodies and their voices, and it was fantastic. Of course, today’s Shared Experience has evolved from that point and we do have sets, costumes and lighting etc., but I suppose the spirit of that work, which is that it is all about what is conjured up in the imagination of the audience, is still there. Very often we will just use a few things to suggest a whole world or landscape. The shows often have a very strong visual and physical life, so, in that sense, it is different from what Mike was doing, but the spirit is still the same.

**EVV:** If you do a show such as, for instance, *Jane Eyre*, there will of course be the recent television adaptations with all their display value and period recreations of the 19th century to compete with.
PT: Yes – but our interest is looking at the universal, whatever is timeless such as the psychology and the big themes of the story rather than the details of that particular time and place. This is not to say that these aspects are not interesting in themselves, but for us the shows are not so much about period detail, but about the aspects that remain potent for us today.

EVV: Do you feel in any way straitjacketed by the fact that, for instance in *Jane Eyre/Wide Sargasso Sea*, there is a Rochester or there is a Bertha/Antoinette to work with, so that you are not free to create original characters?

PT: One of the reasons that we have been drawn to those old stories is that they work as metaphors, they work on a deep, subconscious level. So, while Bertha has a life and a reality and a particular history in the novel in that she is Rochester's first wife and all the rest of it, for me what was exciting about using that novel was the act of exploding it, taking it apart. I was asking, why is there Jane Eyre, this supremely rational heroine, and why is there this other creature who is so much her opposite – out of control, emotional, angry and sexual and all the things that Jane as a Victorian woman is not allowed to be. Once you start to look at them together, Bertha’s presence becomes interesting, as Jane is haunted by this other woman and drawn to her throughout the novel. We are drawn to this attic because we can see it as part of herself that had to be shut away. That is what makes these stories interesting – that they create a vessel in which you can pour your own fascinations.

EVV: How does the process of selecting plays work for your company? *Jane Eyre* is in a way an obvious choice, but your repertoire of adaptations also includes classic Russian novels (*War and Peace*) or even classical plays such as *Orestes*.

PT: What we really find interesting and exciting in theatre is when it is possible to go beyond naturalism and make visible all the stuff that is usually hidden inside us. We want to make the interior life of the characters, the emotional life, the memories, dreams, and fantasies palpable and visible.

EVV: This is clearly different from the Andrew Davies treatment.
Polly Teale

PT: Yes... and it is easy to see why we are drawn to a novel such as *Jane Eyre*: because it offers itself up for this kind of treatment. Likewise, Tolstoy is a very psychological writer whose characters are endlessly complex. He loves to create characters who are full of contradictions, and that is what we are interested in excavating.

EVV: I am also interested in the way how Shared Experience works in terms of funding. Obviously you do not rely solely on ticket sales.

PT: We do get Arts Council funding and certainly there is no way we could survive without it. Our shows, however, generally do sell at the box office and, interestingly, this is one of the reasons we started choosing the famous novels: because you had something that had a hook to it and you could sell it on tour and it would bring in an audience; but at the same time it would also be artistically interesting.

EVV: It is certainly an advantage if you work with a known text so that the audiences have already formed an idea of what to expect - even if this idea may be challenged when they actually see the show.

PT: Absolutely. We are currently trying to put on new work with titles that people do not recognise and there is no doubt that this is much harder to get an audience for – and it is not hard to see why.

EVV: You also do a lot of touring, but not so much touring abroad.

PT: We used to do some amazing tours outside of Britain. We used to take our shows abroad regularly and that is one of the things we really miss. The amount of money available from the British Council to spend on tours has become much tighter. What they tend to do is send smaller companies with a small outfit, whereas our shows tend to be a lot more expensive.

EVV: How do you cope, working with these enormous amounts of text, this vast array of characters, the Victorian ‘baggy monsters’? Is your main task that of pruning, of cutting down to size?

PT: It certainly is about distilling it. The key question, when we are dealing with these texts, is: What is it for me as a woman in the 21st century that still intrigues me in this story? So we will first come up with a theme and if it is a really meaty theme it will pull lots of things...
in Conversation

with it; it gives you some kind of pathway through the novel. For example, with *Jane Eyre*, I decided that the thing I was interested in was the idea that inside this rather contained and controlled, rational person there was hidden someone who was its complete opposite – as I have said before. Once you have made this decision that this would be at the centre of the story that allows you to make all sorts of choices about what you do and do not need. In this way characters will fall by the wayside and you begin to see what you need in order to tell that story. I believe that, when you do an adaptation, it has to be a new act of creativity. If you simply try to imitate the novel or to transcribe the novel onto the stage, you get completely bogged down in all sorts of details and events of the story. That is not what is most interesting about a novel. What you want to get at is the inner life of the story and get beneath the surface of it. That is the challenge: To find the access to that inner life.

EVV: Do you find that difficult to do in the theatre? We were talking about psychological insights and, for instance, a film director would have the choice to say: If we are going for the portrayal of the inner life of a character, we are simply going for the close-up and the facial expression of the actor.

PT: Well, in the case of *Jane Eyre*, by using Bertha to express parts of Jane that are repressed, you literally, physically see on stage what is going on inside her. So we had a scene where she is speaking to Mr Rochester and upstairs Bertha is physicalising everything that is going on inside her. The play begins with Jane and Bertha together. At the beginning of the novel, little Jane is reading a children’s book…

EVV: …Bewick’s *History of British Birds*…

PT: …yes, well remembered. In my version it becomes a book about foreign lands as she finds a description of the West Indies in it, and little Bertha kind of crawls out from behind her. This little girl is in a way her imagination and because the description of the West Indies talks about hurricanes, tidal waves, but also about warm rain, it exposes both the sensual and beautiful part and also the fury, the destructive side. All this is brought to life and we see those two girls play together. In a way, the
story begins in Jane’s imagination, in her interior life, and then we snap back into the real world.

EVV: Would you accept the label “heritage theatre”?
PT: No, I wouldn’t like to use that word. That makes it sound like the thing we spoke about earlier, as if it was about putting the Victorian world on stage. We are not really interested in historical accuracy, but in the human condition.

EVV: What are your current projects? The production of War and Peace is currently on stage.
PT: We want to do a new play. Something I have written for the company, which is completely contemporary. 2

EVV: I find that interesting because Helen Edmundson, for instance, started out writing ‘original’ plays, but once you have become very successful with your adaptations there is the temptation to just go on with that.
PT: Yes.

EVV: Can you tell me more about the new play?
PT: At the moment we are trying to find a tour and a London venue for it, which is actually quite a challenge, because, as I was saying before, it does not have the hook. It is about a couple. A baby is born to a mother who is incapable of looking after the child, so it is taken away and given to foster parents. Then there is a period of between nine months and a year in which the mother has an opportunity to rehabilitate and prove that she could take the baby back.

EVV: Have you ever tried to adapt a text for the screen?
PT: Yes, I am currently adapting my play Brontë into a film.

2 Polly Teale’s new play, Mine, was produced in Shared Experience’s trademark non-naturalistic, expressionist style at the Hampstead Theatre and for a subsequent national tour from October to November 2008. It was published by Nick Hern Books in the same year.
EVV: Thank you very much and good luck with your new play.
Notes on Contributors

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