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The Western States Theatre Review

Volume 8 *2000*

Article 1

2000

The Western States Theatre Review, Volume 8, 2000

Northwest
THEATRE
REVIEW

Volume 8 2000

NORTHWEST THEATRE REVIEW

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Special assistance provided by Humanities Research Services, Washington State University, and the Law Offices of Dawn Reynolds, Pullman, Washington.

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Northwest Theatre Review, Volume 8 (2000), 1–11

Script (Inter)play: Collaborating on Performance Compositions

DON LAPLANT and SUSANN SUPRENANT

At the 1999 Northwest Drama Conference, a group of graduate students from the University of Oregon[1] held a two-part presentation/workshop entitled "Script (Inter)play." On the first day we described the technique and performed an example; on the second day we led participants through the process of creating their own Script (Inter)play which they performed at the close of the workshop. The response we received from participants encouraged us to recount our process in this article.

Script (Inter)play is the name we have given to a developing technique which combines elements of improvisation, performance art, and text deconstruction. Our method grew out of a desire to collaborate with other theatre artists while emphasizing the process of creation over material-rich theatrical production. While all of us continue to work in some capacity on full-scale, polished productions, we also value the chance to participate in "poor" theatre without concern for budgets and lengthy rehearsal schedules.

We have found Script (Inter)play useful for collaborating to create performance compositions as well as a valuable rehearsal tool with classroom applications. Script (Inter)play is closer to what is often termed performance art than the performance of a "play." We call our pieces performance compositions[2] to emphasize the putting together of parts or elements to form a whole. These various elements are generated through collaborative brainstorming and rehearsal but are ultimately composed, that is, written and directed. At times one or two members have taken primary responsibility for writing; directing responsibilities are shared by the group members.

Before describing our work in more detail, the following definitions will begin to explain the process.

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Script—traditionally thought of as a dramatic work by a single author; in this case, the outline or score of a performance piece. After exploring many ideas and materials in rehearsal, we compose a working outline of events which is then further revised. The script develops as a record of what is chosen for performance. It is not the starting point in rehearsal, as is often the case in a standard playscript rehearsal, but rather a scenario to be followed during performance.

Inter—"between, among, mutually, reciprocally." This reflects our rehearsal and performance philosophy and is also an acronym which outlines our process. We place the prefix in parentheses to highlight its importance.

"I" is for *improvisation*, both as standard exploratory theatre exercises and also in the sense of making-do with the materials one finds at hand.

"N" is for *non-*_____, where the blank is filled in variously depending on our current concerns or interests. Some examples we have used are non-linear or non-hierarchical.

"T" is for *text*, in the sense of "words" as well as "theme or topic." Literal text can be either dramatic or non-dramatic. Even the most unlikely sources of text can be performed, such as instructions for operating a toaster. In the other sense of the word, remembering the Latin root for text meant *to weave, to construct*, we think of text as a thematic thread weaving through a piece rather that the piece itself.

"E" is for *environment*. Where, when, and for whom we will perform helps to determine what and how we perform. Standard theatre space and technology is not necessary. What may appear to be environmental limitations generate performance possibilities.

And finally, "R" is for *resources*. Production based theatre tends to rely on the resources of time and money. In our view of the term, however, resources can include found objects and, most importantly, the abilities and interests of the performers. Each of the members of our collaborative group bring with them varied experiences and expertise and these are our primary materials.

Play—This word is one with many definitions, all of which apply to the creation of performance: "Free movement within limits; sport, frolic, engage in games; take part in; a dramatic piece."

In developing our two most recent pieces, our group found it useful to address the two primary aspects of performance composition independently, separating the performance elements (i.e. the Resources, Environment, and Text) from the compositional elements (the Improv and Non-_____). Since our final performances consist of the selective, structured arrangement of the raw materials discovered and developed in the rehearsal process, we find it useful to work backwards though the INTER acronym. We start by compiling a list of performed actions or events, the elements which

are then revised, expanded and ultimately structured into the working outline that becomes our composed script.

Performance Elements

Resources

We begin by brainstorming and creating an inventory of our resources, including both the "subject" resources (i.e., the physical and intellectual attributes of our performers) and the "object" resources (i.e., concrete items and architectural features of our performance space). Since the members of our group were colleagues with a history of collaborative effort, we began our creative process with a fairly extensive knowledge of each other's backgrounds and skills. For companies whose members are less familiar with one another (as was the case at our Northwest Drama Conference workshop), we recommend an extended "getting-to-know-you" conversation where the members are able to introdnce themselves and discuss their skills and interests. The goal is to determine what special skills or talents the group can include in its performance arsenal. For example, are any of the performers musically proficient as composers, lyricists, vocalists or instrumentalists? Have they had any specialized movement training, such as dance, gymnastics, martial arts or mime? Are any of the performers experienced jugglers, magicians, puppeteers or clowns? Can they do any convincing (or entertaining) celebrity or animal impressions? What, in short, can they do?

Perhaps more important than the question "What can they do?" is the quesuon "What do they want to do?" The introductory discussion should also give group members the opportunity to discuss their own intellectual and emotional resources. What are their interests, experiences, affinities and goals? Are there personal or social issues they are particularly interested in exploring in performance? Are there performance modes or styles they are eager to experiment with? Are there other productions, performers or groups they are drawn to or inspired by? If so, what aspects or qualities of these inspiring performances do they wish to capture in their own performance? The desires, inspirations, and interests of the company members are at the foundation of the creative work to be done in the development process.

Beyond the skills and interests of the performers, however, there is another set of valuable resources which easily may be overlooked. Body types and demographic features of the members individually and as a group can be very useful, expressive resources. Consider what the performers' physical bodies can say or mean in performance. Are there, among the company, any extremes in height, weight, age or physical strength which may be used to communicative advantage? Does the group demonstrate diversity in race, gender, sexnal orientauon, ethnicity or physical (dis)ability which may be employed in expressive or symbolic ways in a performance? (If not, might

the lack of diversity be expressive in itself?) What makes the performers unique or remarkable? What can the bodies of the performing subjects say when considered as physical objects?

The objects of conventional theatrical production—props, costumes, scenery, lighting equipment—should also be numbered among the resources of Script (Inter)play, though our group has consciously worked to avoid the spectacle, expense and visual clutter common in traditional, material-rich theatre. We begin by determining what is available to us and then deciding what is essential to us. We ask, what items already exist in our performance space, and how may they be used in performance? What costume, set or prop pieces can company members provide without incurring expense? Evocative items brought to rehearsal by performers can often be explored improvisationally in rehearsal to generate performance material or catalyze creative interaction. The question becomes, how can we use this item? What can we do with it, or what does it make us do? Similarly, simple equipment, such as a tape recorder, video camera or overhead projector, may broaden (or create) performance options if made available during the rehearsal process.

The performance space itself may yield a number of interesting possibilities, especially if it is a space not originally intended to be a theatre. Consider how the architectural features of your presentation space may be used in performance. Are there doors, windows, levels, steps, columns, tables, chairs, mirrors or nooks that provide interesting staging opportunities? If you are performing outdoors, are there trees, paths, knolls, slopes, depressions or water sources you can incorporate? Whether indoors or out, how can the natural, non-theatrical lighting be used theatrically? Are there any interesting acoustical features? Can you produce an echo, for instance? Are there any particularly resonant objects or any surfaces or textures which could be used to create interesting percussive sounds? Think of the performance space as a collaborator in the creative process aud ask what it can contribute to the piece.

Environment

The architectural and/or topographical aspects of a performance space are one part of a broader area of consideration in Script Inter(play). The term "environment" in our acronym extends beyond the physical location to include notions of occasion, audience and performance intention. We believe it is imperative in developing performance compositions to consider the Who, What, When, and Why of the event along with the Where.

The development of the piece would ideally be grounded in an understanding or expectation of who will be in the audience, and what their relationship to the performers will be. Will there be any built-in sense of community or common ground on which the performer-spectator interaction

may be based? What traits or experiences are shared among the performers and spectators? Are there issues or events that may be considered part of a common public consciousness within the community formed at the performance? Is the performance, for instance, part of a larger event such as a confereuce, a class, a political rally or a civic celebration? Does the site of the performance itself carry with it any potential semiotic significance? (A performance in a prison assembly hall, for instance, is likely to differ in some meaningful way from a performance of the same script at the ribbon-cutting ceremony for a new suburban shopping mall.)

The combination of location and occasion can often help determine or clarify a final environmental consideration: the intention of the performance. Live performance engenders a sense of immediacy and community that film and television can never achieve; theatre pieces composed for a specific, known audience or event can further capitalize on this immediacy and community. Why is the group performing? To borrow a question familiar to many student actors, "What is their motivation?" Can they express the goal of their production as an active verb? Is the performance intended to instruct the audience? To inspire them? To denounce an injustice? To incite a riot? To empower? To heal? To celebrate? To raise cousciousness? A clearly articulated intention will help give focus to the rehearsal process, suggest an overall tone for the piece and provide an evaluative criteria to use in selecting and arranging material.

Text

Knowing what you want your production to do, of course, helps shape what you want your production to say. Though the goal of Script (Inter)play is not the mere presentation (or re-presentation) of extant texts, we believe that borrowed texts, especially those that have been judiciously chosen and artfully deconstructed, can be a valuable component of a multi-faceted performance piece. After discussing the iuterests of the company, considering the environment of the performance and identifying a performance intention, company members should be encouraged to create or find relevant or provocative selections of text to add to the growing pool of raw materials. Traditional dramatic literature is one place to look, but interesting, performable text can be found in sources as diverse as poetry, narrative fiction, songs, newspapers, archival documents, historical accounts, speeches, laws, commercial and industrial copy and transcribed interviews. The fiual text of a Script Inter(play) can be developed improvisationally, written by one or more company members or culled from any number of extant sources, but it is important to remember that care should be taken to adhere faithfully to copyright infringement laws, regardless of whether admission will be charged for the performances. Borrowed text should only be incorporated into the production if it is in the public domain, or if appropriate permission has

been granted by the holder of the copyright. These important provisos, while they may appear quite limiting, still leave a wealth of material available for use.

It can be helpful, also, to consider that texts need not be spoken by the performers to be effective in performance. Printed materials distributed among the audience, placards, banners, words written on chalkboards or mechanically projected on a screen can become an integral part of a varied performance as can pre-recorded text or impromptu speech elicited from audience members. Similarly, as many forms of traditional Asian theatre demonstrate, well-defined and repeated gestural language can develop a powerful semiotic resonance. This sort of physical vocabulary may serve as a silent text which can complement or even replace spoken language in a performance.

Composition Elements

The introductory brainstorming and inventory process is only the first step in creating a Script (Inter)play. Once the raw materials and givens of the performance (the Resources, Environment and Text) have been considered and cataloged, the composition process begins in earnest. The resources and texts are explored and experimented with, ideas are tried out, material is evaluated, sorted, added or discarded, and the raw materials are ultimately structured into a final performance script. It is in this second phase of the Script (Inter)play process that the "Non-___" and "Improvisation" come into play as principles to guide the rehearsal and performance-structuring process.

Non-_____

Thinking in terms of "Non-_____" is very important to the philosophical, political and aesthetic principles shared by our company members. As graduate students and theatre-makers we are committed to experimenting, exploring, and learning new ways of working. As such, we attempt to interrogate and challenge the received precepts of theatre-making which, though habit, tradition or institutional inertia, have been passed on to us as unquestioned conventions and mandatory practices. "Non-_____" is a built-in inoculation against the potential limitations of "this-is-the-way-we've-always-done-it." By defining a list of "non-_____s," we strive to overcome artistic stagnation and challenge ourselves to explore novel means of expression. By outlining a list of things we wish to avoid (or deprive onrselves of) we force ourselves to think creatively rather than reflexively, falling back on time-worn, cliched approaches.

We find it helpful, therefore, early in the rehearsal process, to ask "What do we want to avoid, resist, challenge, subvert or do without?" What aspects

of theatrical production have the group members found troublesome on an aesthetic, ethical, political or philosophical level? What conventions of theatre have they taken issue with or found to be out-moded? Do you consider the traditional Director-as-leader-of-the-production-team model of theatrical production to be patriarchal or frustratingly hierarchical? If so, make "Non-patriarchal" production one of your production goals. Do you want to create "non-violent" theatre? Do you want to attempt an entirely "non-verbal" production? Non-elitest? Non-sexist? Non-heterosexist? Non-ethnocentrist? Non-fiction? Non-linear? Non-moralistic? Put simply, the task is to define clearly what you want to eliminate from yonr creative process and product.

Improvisation

Improvisational exercises and principles are applied to the Script (Inter)play process in three distinct ways: as a means of discovering raw material to be further developed in rehearsals; as a physical method of generating staging ideas and structuring the performance script; and, as an over-arching set of principles which sets a collaborative, open atmosphere throughout the process.

The exercises we have used in rehearsal are too varied and extensive to describe within the scope of this article; they come from a number of sources, many of which are familiar to theatre students and teachers from basic acting texts and classroom experiences. Though the exercises themselves vary greatly, the basic, underlying principles of improvisation are considered fairly stable. Our group adopted as general collaborative principles the four basic "rules" of improvisation as expressed by Melanie Moseley, a company member with years of professional experience in performing and teaching improvisation. Moseley's rules of improv, which draw heavily from the work of Keith Johnstone and Viola Spolin, are summarized below:

(1) Say Yes/Accept Offers—accepting the situation, idea or suggestion of a fellow collaborator opens up creative possibilities; whereas, rejecting the offer without trying it only leads to a dead end.

(2) Two Heads are Better than One—by working together, ideas can build and grow upon one another; whereas, stubbornly refusing to give room for a different idea ("being married to your own idea") decreases the creative potential of the group.

(3) Talk 20% of the Time, Listen 80% of the Time—good collaborators listen to one another; bad collaborators monopolize the discussion and close down the creative flow of ideas.

(4) Don't Self-Censor—let yourself follow your impulses rather than letting devoting a large portion of your psyche to the insecure, hyper-critical judge who blocks ideas before they have a chance to be tried.

These rules (even in this grossly simplified explanation) are valuable not only as suggestions for improving improvisatory performances but also as

principles applicable to collaborative work in the rehearsal hall. The Script (Inter)play approach demands a collaborative environment, where all group members contribute to the creative process, and where no single member has ultimate authority. The final script is a collective effort which incorporates divergent ideas and elements, the arrangement of which must be agreed upon by all performers. As such, compromise, negotiation and peaceably resolved aesthetic differences are an essential part of the process. The principles of improvisation help keep the collaborative theories working iu practice.

The following are two examples of how our group has put Script (Inter)play into practice.

Sorrows End

Our group was invited to perform at a colloquium held by the University of Oregon English Department in the Fall of 1998. Because of our previous work with non-dramatic text, we had been offered the challenge to "perform" a Shakespearean sonnet at this gathering of English faculty aud students in the browsing room of the library. We decided to use Sonnet Thirty which ends with the phrase "sorrows end." This became our title and our theme.

The poem triggered a number of ideas/memories about loss and friendship, fears, ghosts and longing. Through discussion and improvisation we compiled our materials. We outlined a rotation of personal "death" stories, repeated bits of Sonnet 30 sung to the tune of an Irish folksong, monologues based on the characters from *Long Day's Journey Into Night* and telephone answering machine instructions. With only three hours available to rehearse, we went through our "script," made a few adjustments and suggestions for stronger movement choices and were ready to perform.

The performance space was a long and narrow lecture hall, with a center aisle, bay windows on one side of the seating, and bookshelves that jutted into the performance space. By theatre standards, the space had many difficulties. Our performance, however, was designed to incorporate the environment, so we highlighted the "quirks" of the room in our staging. (For example, the window boxes became a "madhouse" for one of the characters).

Advice to the Players

Our group devised this piece as a practical example to be presented as part of our Script (Inter)play workshop sessions at the 1999 Northwest Drama Conference. We knew our presentation would be in a carpeted conference room with movable chairs and tables, so we incorporated into our performance the re-arrangement of the furniture into an acting space, as well as a significant amount of movement that involved rolling and sitting on the

carpeted floor. We had a CD player and a single disc and a collection of classical pieces and jazz standards which was to serve as underscore music for certain portions of the performance.

All of our group members are graduate students with extensive acting, directing and teaching experience. Since we anticipated that our audience at the conference would be composed almost exclusively of theatre students and teachers, we chose to base our performance arouud what we imagined would be common theatre education experiences. We interwove some of our favorite theatre classroom exercises and games with bits of advice borrowed from diverse sources ranging from a Dellsarte text to Keith Johnstone to fundamental precepts of martial arts training. We incorporated audience interaction sections, playing off the assumptions that everyone in the room (in fact, most everyone at the conference) had a solid working knowledge of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and were likely to join in on most any theatre game we iuvited them to participate in.

We wanted our piece to serve not only as an example of Script (Inter)play in performance but also to share the sense of fun and play that initially attracted us to theatre. We wanted to create a non-narrative, largely nonverbal piece that incorporated a sense of our who we are as individual theatre artists without losing track of what we have in common. By doing so, we hoped we could celebrate the joy, creative fervor and sense of community the conference instilled in us and to inspire our colleagues in the field to develop their own creative, collaborative projects.

The second day of the workshop provided the opportunity for us to see the type of creative projects we hoped to inspire. The second session of the workshop drew a smaller crowd but all were highly committed to creating and performing within the approximately one hour time limit. We gave a quick outline of Script (Inter)play for the newcomers and reviewed our recommended steps to create a performance piece. The participants were divided into smaller groups of five which then set about "working backwards." We checked in with the groups and facilitated some discussion. The groups, however, were working quite well together, so we set to work creating our own piece. Although we didn't ultimately perform, our rehearsing simultaneously with the other groups served to model the Script (Inter)play process.

After group warm-ups and a thirty minute creation/rehearsal period, two groups performed their Script (Iuter)play pieces. Although the preparation time was minimal, both groups gave fascinating performances which reflected the "drama-conference" environment with humor and insight. The first group found such eclectic resources as: someone had recently performed in *Annie*, someone else knew all of Barbra Streisand's sougs; one group member discovered the conference room carpet was a movable rug rather than wall-to-wall carpeting as expected; the room occupancy signs struck the group as

simple to memorize yet provocative. Their piece, which included movement, singing and chanting, and impromptu shoe-puppets, became a sort of ode to the lack of personal space suffered by conference participants combined with the paradoxical increase in intimacy and knowledge.

The second group, who began their rehearsal by introducing one another, were anxious about the limited rehearsal time. They hit upon the fact that in examining one another's conference name tags, they had already established a movement pattern and a text. They decided to look no further than their own names and "person." Since they had sat in a circle to begin their introductions, the group decided to use that as their starting position and move in and out of a circle during the piece. In performance, they expanded from "introducing" one another and requested and exchanged name tags. Some bartered with personal items from their pockets. Dramatic conflict emerged when some refused their tags or attempted to collect several. The piece aptly commented on the level of "sharing" that conference participants are asked to take part in. The quest for names seemed to highlight both the superficiality of casual greetings and the underlying sacredness of one's "own" name. Related ideas surfaced such as creating a "name" for oneself and historical differences regarding gender and "taking" a name.

In the debriefing following the performances, the groups talked a bit about their process and discoveries. The response to the Script (Inter)play process was overwhelmingly positive. Many participants were inspired to use the approaches discussed and practiced in the workshop sessions to develop pieces of their own, when they returned from the conference. Others expressed an interest in the potential classroom and rehearsal-hall applications of the Script (Inter)play methods. The success of the performances created by workshop participants after only thirty minutes of rehearsal encouraged us to continue working on applications of the Script (Inter)play approach.

In conclusion, our work with Script (Inter)play grew out of an interest in performance art and the desire for creative collaboration. A major focus of our work has centered on exploring notions of spectator communities as a way to generate performance events which do not rely on material-rich production values but, rather, respond to the immediacy of the performance potential. Most recently, we have expanded our use of this technique in the rehearsal of existing dramatic texts to help student actors move beyond a realistic acting style.

Since the workshop presentation, members of our group have continued to develop skills which can be used as subject resources in future Script (Inter)play collaborations. One of our members has become increasingly involved in Akido and stage combat training, while others have further explored children's theatre or received Viewpoints training. Thus, as our resources continue to evolve, our Script (Inter)play work changes as well. One

of our primary goals for the coming year is to focus on pedagogical applications of devising and presenting performance compositions in our Introduction to Theatre and Theatre History courses.[3] As theatre practitioners and educators, we look forward to learning more about collaboration and performance and believe that Script (Interplay) will help us do so.

Notes

1. The group consisted of the authors of the present article plus Jonathan Cole, Loel Harmon and Melanie Moseley. The group was assisted in the presentation by Elisa Morrison, an undergraduate student also for the University of Oregon.
2. Performance compositions are sometimes referred to as "devised theatre."
3. See our forthcoming article, "Script (Inter)play in the Theatre Arts Classroom."

Suggestions for Further Reading

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Northwest Theatre Review, Volume 8 (2000), 12–15

A Thought on Pacing: Slow Down, We Move Too Fast!

EDWARD K. BOWEN

After viewing a recent production of *Hamlet* at Portland Center Stage, my primary criticism of the performance was with the pace. However, it was not with how "slow" the production was, but, instead with the way the actors moved through words, ideas, whole passages with nary a pause for reflection or contemplation. "To be or not to be" was delivered with the emotional weight of a bingo caller. While there is certainly a sense of gathering momentum to any tragedy, this production, along with many I have witnessed recently, seemed to be all about speed. From farce to tragedy, high comedy to low melodrama, dialogue, scenes, acts and whole plays fly along as though entered in some Guinness attempt at running time. It is for this reason I feel it necessary to "pause" a moment and explore (for myself, as well as others) the problems of pace, of why we feel the need to rush, and of how we might better illuminate and savor the moments of high drama.

Any discussion of pace is, at best, an ambiguous one. As James Thomas states in his book on *Script Analysis*, "Timing, speed, pace, tempo, and rhythm are five different, but related concepts. They have no precise definitions in the theatre." They are, admittedly, extremely subjective, but nevertheless, they are critical to engaging and holding an audience. Thomas sees pace as "the spectator's or director's subjective perception of speed emotionally." It is this emotional aspect of pace that seems most important, and, today, the one which seems most often overlooked.

What is emotional pace? By the nature of its being emotional, it must initially lie in the characters and their complex relationships to each other and to the circumstances. But beyond the characters in the world of the play, the sense of pace really comes from the degree of emotional connection between performers and spectators. As Thomas notes, pace is "the spectator's or director's" perception of emotional speed. The director, alone in a darkened auditorium tries to gage the ideal emotional speed for the

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anticipated audience. The audience then confirms or disagrees with the director's perceptions given its sense of connection. It is in this ability to judge the level of emotional engagement of the audience that directors appear to have lost a trust in the material, the actors, or their audience. The consequence is that, too often, emotional engagement seems to have been sacrificed for the intense exhilaration of speed.

If, from my perspective, the problem has become one of productions seeming to gather speed as they progress, the question then, seems to be why we as directors feel the need to continually push the pace? Have we ourselves lost patience with the gradual unfolding of events? Have we come to distrust our audience's ability to stay engaged? Do we feel a sense of panic when a production's running time reaches 3 hours? Why do we seem to sacrifice careful exploration of feeling for rapid acceleration of pace? There are doubtless many answers, but I believe that subconsciously we have allowed ourselves to be deeply affected by the world around us.

Perhaps the biggest influence on theatre artists and pacing is film. Much of the film we see is about giving audience members more and faster experiences. Not only are we literally being wisked away at an ever-increasing speed, but even the images we are given change more rapidly. Fixed camera angles have grown so short that it is remarkable we don't fall victim to motion sickness from the never-ending variety of perspectives. Exhilarating—maybe, moving—hardly. Film can take us close up, but it rarely trusts itself or us to linger there and experience the emotion of a human being thinking or feeling deeply. When a film director does trust the camera at rest, it becomes very powerful. Not surprising! Silence works in very much the same way. So much emphasis has been placed on film scoring, that the "silent film" moment has a renewed sense of power. It is the rare director who will trust that silence. We must continue to remember that silence and stillness are very much the stuff of drama, and we must trust that power. I believe it is the best of what we are.

Additionally, we live now in a day-to-day world that is all abont speed. We tap our foot waiting for the compnter to boot up or to connect to the next internet page. Speed dialing, microwave dinners, fast airline check-in, all of it is about how little time we will have to use. It is about how quickly we can move on to the next fast, but meaningless experience. With the emphasis on speed comes the increased discomfort in standing still. We become less patient being stuck in traffic or stuck in line. We must be constantly moving forward. Silence and stillness mean that nothing is happening. We in the theatre know that much of what is dramatic lies in silence; we know the power of the figure saying "Let's go," and not moving. We have been trained to recognize that if a moment is active, is "filled," that it stands on its own, silent or not. However, the world around us continually leads us to distrust what we know is true. That silence can be filled by the spectators' response to it.

For a more concrete discussion of this admittedly abstract and subjective notion of pace, let me return briefly to this fall's Portland production of *Hamlet*. It was a clear telling of the Hamlet story. I don't know how much was edited for the 3 hour and 15 minute production, but I do know there was no lack of energy in the production. Hamlet was an imposing, intense figure who, from the first, attacked the role and his circumstances. I was, for the most part, engaged. Being somewhat sensitive to pace lately, I was aware; however, that what I was feeling was not really the engagement of the dramatic; it was the engagement of the activity.

When I say the engagement of the dramatic, I refer to those powerful times when we are drawn further into the world of the play. We are caught up in all the aspects of the moment: the characters, with their desires and fears, and the situation, with all its potential and danger. The engagement of the dramatic is the emotional harvest that we reap from both characters and circumstances.

The engagement of activity, on the other hand, is little more than the stimulation that comes from something such as a car chase. Along for the ride, we are exhilarated by the sheer speed and the inherent sense of danger that speed produces. Perhaps we are even dazzled by the dexterity of the driver in manipulating the twists and turns along the way. With the car chase, however, we eventually want to slam on the brakes, get out and take a moment to breathe and get our bearings. With the dramatic, we don't want the ride to end. We hope it will go on and on. As we gain a greater understanding and empathy for the characters we want to stay with them. We, in fact, are saddened when the ride is over.

My intent here is to remind us of that engagement of the dramatic. It is to urge us all to reinvestigate and even exploit those powerful moments that only the theatre can give us. It is to implore each of us to work to draw our audience in and not fear that we will lose them in a moment of silence. These ideas, I know, are basic to the theatre, but antithetical to contemporary life. Sometimes, we need to be minded of these fundamental truths. When I teach Directing I, I am reminded of many basics that are paramount to mounting a production. I find those reminders healthy and reinvigorating, but they are often forgotten in the rush to put a production before an audience.

I believe the same can be said for our sense of pace. Let's realize the power of what we offer to an audience. Let's sense those monumental moments for characters, those emotional crossroads that are worthy of pause, of stillness. The drama is in the moment, however brief, that exists just prior to a decision. In those moments of silence lie the fateful choices, the new discoveries and the unexpected reflections. That is the power of the drama. That is an "emotional pace" that needs to be slowed down, savored, and shared with an audience, so they may enter that moment with us. That is the

power of real emotional engagement. It is an audience right in the seat beside us, perhaps with one hand on the wheel, sharing the journey. It is not dragging them along, holding on for dear life, afraid at the next turn they will simply have to let go from sheer exhaustion. Or worse, we will whip to the left or right, ejecting them from their seat and never even miss them. Let's trust our audience to settle back and enjoy the journey. It is our job to make sure we have an engaging itinerary, and that those dramatic vistas are pointed out and relished. It is our job to ensure that when the audience leaves us, it is smiling—"that was 3 hours? It felt like 3 minntes!"

Northwest Theatre Review, Volume 8 (2000), 16–33

Metaphor within the Method: The Scenography of the Group Theatre

SCOTT DAHL

The Group Approach

Art and design are difficult to define. Some suggest art is the practice of technique and style to create objects of beauty, while design remains its functional cousin. Yet, art and design share both stylistic and functional characteristics. It is the individual artist or the designer who chooses his/her intent. For many, artistic responsibility includes presenting issues and depicting points of view. In 1931 a theatrical collective formed in New York City and adopted the name the Group Theatre. The Group Theatre felt this responsibility and took it upon itself to champion a style of drama previously nnknown to the American Stage. Behind this work are the lives and work of a few talented designers who remain undiscovered by the fascination of more recent generations.

The Group developed a unique style of presentation aside from their well known acting method and political agenda. The depth of meaning executed in the scenography of the Group is little known. The set designs were as important to their productions as any other element presented. Lee Strasberg was among the few whom later acknowledged the importance of Group staging.

> A lot of aspects of the Group are misunderstood. The Group actually set a style, not a fixed style, but a certain basic approach to the treatment of reality on stage not only in acting but also in production. Max Gorelik and to some extent Boris Aronson, of course, were very instrumental in that aspect of the work. Especially Max, who had ideas of his own and who could contribute what he had to offer. He was really in a sense the Group designer. He had as much to do with creating the vision of the play on stage as any of us, and his role and that of design generally in the Group has not had enough attention paid to it.

After proper investigation, it seems inexcusable to allow the Group their great role in American Theatre history without allowing the visual importance of their staging its rightful place along side their acting, directing and content.

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The designers were among the best of their day. Max Gorelik designed eleven Group productions, Boris Aronson four and Donald Oenslager three. Robert Edmond Jones, Cleon Throckmorton, Watson Barrett, Paul Morrison, and Herbert Andrews designed single Gronp sets. Gorelik and Aronson designed the lion's share of Group productions including the better-known and more successful designs. Of the others, only Throckmorton's set for *House of Connely* can be considered of importance. Both Jones and Oenslager, two of the most successful designers in our history, were ineffective with the Group. Designing for the Group was not an easy task. Gorelik and Aronson developed a collaborative relationship with the Group ensemble. Most of their settings showed an intimacy and accuracy far beyond realism. To qnote Clnrman, "A look not only realistic, but accepted as real." He was referring to a metaphorical sense of realism. Fractured or minimal, the designs of these two young men communicated an inner reality of the play which spoke to the Group's own unified vision.

The 1930's featured a favorite style of the Communist Party: Social Realism, a type of socialist naturalism. The imagery was to present truth; that is, the ugly truth of class reality. The Group adapted this style for its artistic merits: inherent metaphorical imagery. The Groups' best success can be seen through this realism. It was well suited to the art and consciousness of Odets, Gorelik and Aronson. In this vein, the leftist theatre and the little theatre movement changed new theatre away from the Broadway mold of trite melodramatic representation.

Owing to his unbiased political awareness as well as his own philosophical and artistic beliefs, Gorelik's presence cannot be underestimated as influencing the quality of the Group productions usually reserved for the acting, playwriting and directing. Aronson to a lesser degree may also be given this credit. Their settings were not without failure. What lives on is a sense of commitment and dedication as well as a unique blend of emotion and thought. It is difficult to comprehend why this should be called experimental in any age. While their results were varied, no one can argue the clarity of their intent. In the words of Bobby Lewis, "What is an artist, if not a designer of truth?"

The Group theatre struggled to mesh Expressionism, Naturalism and Social Realism into a single art. This was their greatest challenge. The theatrical times were at a crossroads of emotional expression and scientific functionalism. This was never more obvious than in the art of The Group Theatre and in particular the work of Max Gorelik.

The thirties, and especially Max Gorelik, showed the influence of functional practices of Brecht, Piscator and The Bauhaus. The Bauhaus developed a design discipline aimed at economy and function. It served a purpose. It shunned glamour, self-expression and decorative detail. Meyerhold's Contructivist techniques also emphasized function. Gorelik developed a theory

of design for the theatre, which combined these aesthetic principles with elements of Marxism and Freudian psychology into what he called the Scenic Imagination. He lectured for over 50 years on his principles of imagination, accuracy and justification. At the heart of his Scenic Imagination was a Scenic Metaphor developed through collaboration with the production team and observation of the rehearsal process.

Aronson was trained in the stylized Meyerhold tradition. He studied under Alexandra Exter, a Constructivist designer at Alexander Tairov's Kamerny Theatre in Moscow. Aronson condemned realistic set design and perceived theatre as an artistic form in and of itself. This is the most obvious product of his training at home. The Group often performed exercises based on the concepts of Modern Art. They would improvise characters based on the abstractions of modern cubist paintings. Strasberg felt in many ways the Group upheld these innovative principles. Aronson believed the world of drama continually offered insights into life and to not experiment with its forms of presentation was to stagnate the evolution of our own beings. To Aronson, each new design offered a form of rebirth for the artist. It is not difficult to see how the political and social awareness of the Group mixed so smoothly with these functional mannerisms. The resulting art form was quite intelligent. It had a conscious. Yet, it was art, none the less. Gorelik was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship to research the influence of scientific and industrial technique upon methods of scene designing and staging.

In the late twenties Gorelik and Aronson were skeptical of American staging and the many domestic topics being presented. The feelings were mutual. Lee Simonson condemned both men's work, calling Aronson's work an "exotic and transplanted thing" full of "Russian dogma." Simonson deemed their work totally inapplicable to the American stage. Simonson took his criticism of Gorelik to the pages of *Theatre Crafts* with such vigor, Gorelik was allowed room for rebuttal. Ironically, in 1927 Simonson suffered a nervous breakdown and was unable provide a design for John Howard Lawson's *Processional.* Simonson recommended Gorelik provide the design. This turned out to be Gorelik's big break on Broadway. Simonson conld not deny him his talent and enthusiasm, regardless of their differences.

Both Gorelik and Aronson had met Group members through their involvement with Maurice Schwartz's Yiddish Theatre in the late twenties. Fellow Eastern Enropeans, the Yiddish theatre of the day may be considered quite avant-garde for its time. In 1926 the Yiddish Art Theatre presented *The Tenth Commandment* as its premiere production. Aronson's scene design featured a rather disturbing proscenium. It was shaped as a human head. Layers of plafforms, ladders, fire escapes and fire poles created a sense of emotion and activity within the "mind" of the stage picture.

Gorelik referred to this style as Hassidist Grotesque. Gorelik had himself designed for the Yiddish Art Theatre a setting for *God, Man and Devil* in this

vein. Hassidism was a seventeenth century Jewish cultural tradition known for its rather Dionysian mysticism. This outlaw sect fostered a rebirth of arts among the Jews. Gorelik described their style as a "melancholy and quaint lyric fantasy." It was adopted by Eugene Vakhtangov's Habima Studio of the Moscow Art Theatre and the Moscow State Jewish Theatre. Strasberg felt the Group's activity very closely resembled the work of Vakhtangov. Vakhtangov, like Meyerhold, had found inspiration in African and Asian aesthetic principles of spontaneity and instinct. Non-realistic, primitive, minimal forms were light in scenic detail and connotation and heavy in mysticism and suggestion. This creativity and the new scientific discoveries of the laws of the universe made definite conclusions about nature nothing short of lies. The fantastic now seemed probable. The Habima staging was a macabre mixture of expressionism and theatricalism. It was characterized by painted cubist patterns and bizarre constructed perspectives. The style remained popular through the twenties and thirties. It had long been ridiculed by the Soviet press for its ignorance to the industrial reforms underway in Russia. It met equal criticism in the depression era United States.

The Group's staging showed a concern for all of the afore mentioned genres. They wanted to have their cake and eat it as well, every last bit, licking the plate and nibbling the crumbs. They wanted the respect of the poor and the praise of the wealthy. Group designers were asked for historical accuracy as well as the artistic innovation of the "new stagecraft." The Group should be given credit for reaching many levels in the execution of their productions. History has seemingly positioned them solely with credit for developing their "method." But even this method as well as their staging had a higher goal in mind: a singular metaphor for the entire production. The staging was no less than integral.

The early twentieth century brought about a revolution in drama around the world. While all but Andre Antoine and the Naturalists in Europe were questioning realism, American Realism was alive and well. America was developing a socially conscious theatre. While realistic in form, it introduced alternate styles of staging as well as a content concerned with the American situation. The resulting hybrid was an entirely nnique theatre—the first that America could call its own. The Group theatre was this unique blend at its best.

The Group Theatre embraced and championed a new way of thinking. Theirs was an eclectic art. It was fascinating on many levels yet thoroughly appreciated on only a few. The Group is remembered for their acting and politics. Some words are hard to forget: "STRIKE, STRIKE, STRIKE!" Their visual art is neglected. Their metaphorical presentations and the set designs that framed them are little known.

The Group Theatre was a permanent ensemble which changed only marginally over the decade of the thirties. History has categorized Gorelik as a Gronp associate. However, one night in 1933 on the stage of the Broadhnrst

Theatre Max Gorelik was overwhelmingly accepted as a Group member by the actors. As Ruth Nelson phrased it, "He was totally our designer . . . his sets spoke the very sense and feeling we had of our own work." The directors later denied a formal membership. Gorelik protested their right to refuse him entrance into a collective. Unfortunately, this conflict caused a three year void in the Gorelik/Group collaborations. Aside from these three years from 1934 to 1937, Gorelik designed 11 of 16 Group productions including *Success Story, Men in White, Golden Boy,* and *Rocket To The Moon.* While Gorelik wasn't the only designer for the Group, he was the most often used and seemed to phrase it best: "The Group Theatre has perfected its ensemble approach aud is moving onward. They are creating toward a true synthesis of script, directing, acting, and setting." The scene design of Gorelik and the others was a large part of this synthesis. He felt the Group developed an understanding of the need for a good set and the importance of its relevance. In this regard the Group played an important role in American theatre. They were among the first to develop the importance of stage setting within an entire production. The Group's story is one of staging as well as acting.

The Group directors encouraged their designers to attend rehearsals to develop a scene design as the cast was simultaneously developing their business. The directors collaborated with the designers to develop a strategy common to a single goal: a social agenda with a message. The set was to be part of the prodnction and act as a framework for the rest of the production to hang on. Most Broadway producers felt a setting with a point of view called attention to itself. The Group felt the opposite. They felt the uninvolved setting called attention to itself. The Group felt a set which did not know what its role was every moment of a performance inevitably hindered the performance.

The scenography that grew out from the Group productions is as unique and powerful and consistent as its other attributes. A permanent company like the Group is the only type which could have developed the productions they offered at the time. The plays of the Group were developed, not put together. The hiring office approach owes more to luck and instinct than thought and talent. With no other group in American theatre history was an entire team approach allowed to its members. Max Gorelik accompanied the Group for a summer of rehearsals to develop his design for *Men In White.* That it turned out to be their only Pulitzer Prize winner was no accident. While mostly known for the acting style, the scenography of Group productions was as integral and successful as the acting method. Not only did Clifford Odets develop his writing style from his shared experience with his compatriots, Gorelik also developed his talents. His concepts of Scenic Imagination and Scenic Metaphor were developed with the overall contribution of the Group. They rebelled against the casting office style of production, where a design is created for visual effect only, with its stage success merely an

accident of the best bet. Designers, like actors, were cast by style and afraid to vary from what was trid and true. Their engagements were based on their stereotype. The Group felt the commercial theatre was based on hunches more than specifics and hindered true creativity and originality.

A look at the Group's first production season is a fascinating and telling story of their existence. The Group was daring in their choice of plays. At the time, playwrights such as John Howard Lawson, Robert Ardrey, John Dos Passos, Elmer Rice and Sidney Kingsley wrote plays with social significance. The Group began with Paul Green's *House of Connely,* Paul and Claire Sifton's *1931,* and Maxwell Anderson's *Night Over Taos. House of Connely* and *Night Over Taos* were designed by two of the most talented and "experimental" designers of the day, Cleon Throckmorton and Robert Edmond Jones, respectively. As the technical director of the Provincetown Playhouse and the Playwrights Theatre, Throckmorton designed many original productions of Eugene O'Neill's plays. Trained as an engineer, he was swift and efficient. Both Jones and Throckmorton designed effective sets. Throckmorton's included large, dark features. His socially realistic interior of a Southern Mansion spoke to the decay of a once decadent society within the play. It also featured an old family portrait and a confederate flag positioned prominentlv on a large mantle. The script was not without its social relevance. The House of Connely can only survive if the son marries the daughter of a tenant farmer. Her only hope for the future is in the land, but the black workers are unsympathetic to her dream. Iu the end they smother her in a sack. Green often wrote about strange relationships of different classes and races common in the south, which were typically not spoken of. The Group retreated over the summer of 1931 to rehearse. Green visited after several weeks of rehearsals and was convinced to change his sad, pessimistic ending. The Group saw survival through work, not death through ignorance. Gorelik, intrigued by the notion of a dedicated ensemble, also visited. He first suggested the motto, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul." Odets would later proclaimed it more directly when he insisted, "Life is not printed on dollar bills." While Throckmorton's design was socially realistic, it was also very expressive, almost seutimental. But while it fits quite well with the Group's developing production agenda, they would be more intrigued by the work of Max Gorelik.

The Group next produced *1931,* written by journalists Paul and Claire Sifton. The play has fourteen scenes separated by ten interludes. The interludes were to provide the point of view and solidarity of the masses. The scenes relate individual stories and difficulties within a depression-era society. The structure was to provide a gradual transcendence for the individual into the group. Set around New York City, the hero of the play, Adam, is a modern day "everyman." After a series of hardships he loses his fiancee. She turns to prostitution to survive. After wandering about from job to job, earning

neither money nor dignity, Adam tries to pick himself up out of the gutter by sweeping up at a coffee shop. Here he chances to meet his love. Reconciliation is impossible, as she has contracted a venereal disease. The message of the play is that this couple's lives and happiness have been smothered by the harsh economics of the depression.

It is in this final scene that demonstrators gather outside the coffee shop. Adam joins a hunger march. To the tune of the "Internationale," they walk into police gas and machinegun fire. The idea was to create a ground swell of revolution. Strasberg and Gorelik attempted to aid the Siftons in the dramatic progression toward revolt.

Gorelik designed a brilliantly simple set. The various interludes played in front of a large warehouse facade. Within the facade were three wide, menacing corrugated iron doors. The doors opened to reveal the settings for the various scenes. A catwalk surrounded the stage space allowing the upper class tourists to portray physically their social and intellectual detachment from the masses below. The warehouse doors rose and fell like guillotines, making the entrances and exits dangerous and precise timing a necessity. Delays in blocking made the actors nervous about learning Gorelik's ground plan. This set was similar in nature to Gorelik's sense of humor. His sarcasm was as merciless as his setting. The iron texture and perceived weight of the doors acted as a metaphor for the inhuman forces which overwhelmed Adam. The stark imagery of this warehouse facade aided in the credibility of the final scene. This is the first metaphorical set design applied to a Group production and one of the first on Broadway.

Clurman described the staging as a "stern beauty; sensitive, vibrant, full of heartache and mute love." Gorelik represented metaphorically the better aspects of the play: heartache, vibrancy and sensitivity. These early Group plays had very long reading and analysis periods and left much stage work preparation to the last weeks. The production suffered. The play was typical of Gorelik's work to date: a well received, functional set for a script more political than dramatic. The play also introduced the Group to a new, radical, louder audience. Critics noted the audience's reaction as "stunned" and " terrified." One expressed, "It quivers with a sense of living tragedy." Attending Group productions has been compared to witnessing a real accident. *1931* would be a fine example.

Some radical groups called it defeatist; more conservative patrons couldn't relate to the propaganda. This was the beginning of a situation the Group would never resolve: how to present socially meaningful plays in a Broadway environment. Gorelik, even then, was an outspoken proponent of the leftist theatre. Clurman published the following statement in the *1931* program entitled "What The Group Theatre Wants."

> A Theatre in our country today should aim to create an audience. When an audience feels that it is really at one with the theatre; when audience and theatre people can feel that they are both the answer to one another, and that both may act as leaders to one another, there we have the Theatre in its truest form. To create such a theatre is our real purpose.

Closing night was a rousing evening. This audience had been found. The Group was not, however, prepared for them. The well known shout came from the balcony, "long live the Soviet Union!" to which a startled Franchot Tone rebutted, "Hurrah for America!" There has probably never been such an exciting and rousing flop. Gorelik correctly had pointed out the incongruity of the subject matter they were presenting and the Broadway audience they were presenting to. The radical audience could not support the Group. This was the Group's failing and most respected success. For a short while they introduced a type of drama to the Broadway stage unparalleled before or since. Their demise was inevitable; a decade of success, in hindsight, was highly improbable. Their longevity, to all our benefit, was that they correctly recognized their soapbox was indeed a stage. *1931* closed nine days after it opened. Yet, the Group's path was laid out before them.

The Group completed their first season with Maxwell Anderson's *Night Over Taos*. The play is about feudal life in the New Mexico area before the "gringos" settled, and the land owners' fight to keep their land in the face of American invasion. Yet, the play is devoid of broad, urban social significance. What little significance it had was diffused by the excessively florid writing style of Anderson. The production would not have made it past the first week had Stella Adler not condemned the Group and the author for giving up on any material so soon. It lasted only another week. Jones' style would seem a good fit with Anderson's. Jones designed a single set interior: a realistic but expressive great hall of the Montoya hacienda. Harold Clurman thought the set rather passive in relation to the play, an opinion no doubt fanned by the fire of Gorelik's guillotine doors. Perhaps the set detracted from the social significance of the struggle for land. Clurman suggested a crucifix to be placed center stage on the back wall. Jones was taken aback by a suggestion from anyone other than the director. He didn't realize Clurman's standing within the collective. He agreed to the crucifix. Ironically, the set was the most highly praised aspect of the production.

Anderson, like Jones, was an incurable romantic. To quote Jones, "Romance and glamour have always seemed to me to be the very foundation of the Theatre . . . every heroine is the princess in the fairy tale and every hero is a hero of romance." Quite obviously the philosophy of Jones was at odds with the temperament of the Group. The Group's passion had too much anger; its fairy tale had too much class reality; its nobility had too much of the vernacular.

Gorelik noted of Jones, "He always liked the sunny side of the street, who could blame him." Gorelik certainly did not. In a profession of animosity

these two men shared an unthreatening, respectful friendship. Early in Gorelik's career Jones noticed Gorelik attempting to copy his own style. He asked Max why he wouldn't rather do his own work, even if it were less good for a while. In Jones' eye the only path to creative success was through your own vision. Gorelik remembered Jones' words, "Have you ever looked at children's drawings, the drawings of insane people, folk art, Negro art? Study them, note their honesty; their innocence and romantic fever." Gorelik had to start over. Jones demanded, "Find your own voice." In many ways this was the way of the Group and in particular the method of Strasberg. The actors had to tear down themselves to build again. The process was physical, cerebral and emotional. This was as painful for Gorelik as it was for many Group actors. And so, Gorelik began finding his way while working with the Group.

The most commercially successful elements of the Group's first season were the revised drama of Paul Green and the expressive sets of Jones and Throckmorton. Yet, regardless of the lessons learned from their first season, the Group continued to mount socially conscious scripts around the sets of Max Gorelik. All of their productions over the next two years were in this vein. *Success Story* and *Big Night* in 1932-33 and *Men in White* and *Gentlewoman* in 1933-34. The Group would be rewarded for their efforts with two of their most commercially successful productions.

John Howard Lawson's *Success Story* ran for 128 performances, very fortunate considering the last two failures and the Group's poor economic position at the time. *Success Story* was written in the Symbolist tradition. Many playwrights of the day where experimenting with various styles. A three act play, the single office scene was described by Gorelik as "one of the first modernistic interiors on the Broadway stage." Thus the set, inspired by a cubist painting by Braque, personified the society it mocked. Its Formica and glass block walls portrayed a "motorcar sleekness" many wealthy business executives try to put around themselves.

Originally entitled *Death in An Office, Success Story* is a realistic script about a young advertising executive who has turned toward capitalism with his growing success. Sol Ginsberg turns to blackmail and forgets the friends he made along his rise. His soul is in ruin grasping for success. He states, "I work like a dog, my brain buzzes at night . . . money is power." Stella Adler was credited with an amazing performance in the last scene during which her character, Sarah, shoots Sol rather than see him lost to the capitalist system. Gorelik felt the play required the actors to become both detached from and accentuated by the scenery. Sometimes contrasted while allowing them to melt into the set in another part of the same design. Gorelik designed inordinately large walls. The tall walls added a surrealistic feel to an otherwise realistic room. So, while these walls complemented the realistic scenes with their detail, there size and proportions complemented the more emotional abstractions in the play. Gorelik criticized the inherent nature of

Symbolist drama. He felt plays of that type developed poetic intensity as a substitute for true dramatic climax. In this genre issues remain unsettled as the plays concluded in a burst of "rhapsodic" poetry. Gorelik felt other Group productions of Clifford Odets' *Paradise Lost* and Paul Green's *Johnny Johnson* suffered similar indecisiveness. Gorelik's design was a fine complement to the production and earned him more confidence from the Group members.

The following season the Group again retreated to rehearse Sidney Kingsley's *Men in White*. A play in three acts with nine scenes, the play is set around a hospital. Gorelik designed as the dominating element a central corridor. Many rooms came off of it. In one scene a small light lit the floor nurse, while the rest of the corridor remained in darkness. Yet, the presence of the corridor always remained looming in the background. It allowed the other scenes to take place around and within it, paralleling the many stories that do take place around such immense institutions. This was also one of the first unit sets to be staged within a single, larger space designed as an overall metaphor for the central theme of the play. Gorelik succeeded with smooth and effective transitions in spite of Kingsley's lengthy set descriptions. Sets rolled on and off stage, which the large wing space of the Broadhurst Theatre allowed. In contrast, Gorelik's sets were rather minimal but no less visually descriptive and appropriate. Critics awarded Gorelik for "giving the play a dimension which is little more than hinted at in the script." He captured the essence of a hospital to complement Strasberg's procedural "essence." Strasberg would have the cast rehearse their operation wash up every morning. They would move about the stage in silence, void of marks and verbal queues, moving within and around fellow actors and staging with almost mystical accuracy.

The central corridor featured an antiseptic design of polished areas. The floor was polished black. Dark walls provided a high contrast with the doctors' white garb. This helped bring out the glitter of the instruments as well. The emphasis was rather specific and yet no less metaphorical than other productions. Clurman coined it "an abstraction both functional and expressionistic." Doctors in attendance testified to the realism of the production, stating, "That's exactly what it is like!"–interesting observations given the minimal staging, unrealistic color scheme and ballet like movement. It wasn't as it was; it was better. The doctors idealized themselves within the production. Of course, the play was not without its social significance. Issues such as socialized medicine and abortion were dealt with. While the play ends in tragedy, again, the Group convinced the playwright to alter the ending to a more positive note.

This was the Group's and Gorelik's most important success for their reputations, their conviction toward nonrealistic sets and for the commercial attention it received. It was a truly theatrical execution, a great human drama. The play ran for 311 performances. *Men in White* narrowly beat out Maxwell

Anderson's *Mary of Scotland* with its Jones designed settings for the Pulitzer Prize. The success of the play was no doubt due to its dramatic strength more so than its social significance. This play had a fine balance between the two, which the Group would find difficult to obtain in a script. The other two productions of these season, *Big Night* and *Gentlewoman* failed to find such a balance.

It was around this time that Gorelik was voted into the Group by the actors. They truly felt he was one of them. They loved the simplicity in which he worked, never attempting to show off Max Gorelik. Like the actors, he attempted to project the meaning of the play. Ruth Nelson noted, "He made it so nice for the actors to work in. He was such a beautiful designer."

That Gorelik was never formally made a Gronp member left him wounded. He lashed out like a cornered beast at times. He accused the directors of favoritism in casting, exploiting the actors and attempting to make him break the pay scale of his own union. Of course, in hindsight, all of this was true. The directors had their favorites. The women of the Group in particular were left out of some decision making. Even the choice of plays favored the males' roles. Stella Adler, in particular, was frustrated by her choice of roles. Never was it suggested that a play be produced, because it so well suited one of the women in the Group. Many have since spoke out that the Group was chauvinistic, a man's theatre. Ruth Nelson, ironically the most often used actor in the Group from the first to last play, was often shunned. Nelson felt no joy within her Group experience. In terms of her career he deemed her involvement a "disaster." Still, she would not have done otherwise had she been given the chance. The Group was that fascinating to her.

When Gorelik demanded to be shown the Group's financial accounting, Clurman swiftly denied him. Gorelik was outspoken and demanding. He often asked for a larger fee than the Group could afford. Although he suffered a split with the Group, he never felt as though it was permanent. Three years later Gorelik returned from Europe from researching via his Guggenheim grant. Upon his return he was invited back to the Group to continue the relationship he valued so much. Nowhere else in America could a designer find such a rewarding opportunity to make a unified statement to an audience. He belonged with the Group. Clifford Odets said of other designers of the day, "These old boys are sorts of interior decorators, but no living human being walks through their rooms once they are finished . . . grimness is needed, not blandness. This is true for my type of man." Gorelik and Aronson were Odets type of man. *Awake and Sing* gave the actors their greatest moments. *Men in White* gave the Group their only Pulitzer Prize. *Golden Boy* and *Rocket to the Moon* was their most complete package. All of these plays can be termed socially realistic. All but one were the plays of Odets, all but one the sets of Gorelik. Both were professionally born of the Group.

Gorelik's Scenic Imagination

Upon entering the theatre Max Gorelik noted the unique situation of the scenic designer. He could talk theory with the producers, the magic of the moment with the actors and pull nails with the carpenters. Typically, in the hierarchy of the theatre the actors made up the upper class of the profession. The stagehands and technicians were the lower class. As a designer Gorelik felt he belonged to neither. And yet, he felt he belonged to both. More importantly, he was accepted by both. He liked that. It is no wonder the social awareness of the Group appealed to Gorelik.

Max Gorelik's career covered the fields of scenography, dramatic theory, theatre history, playwriting and teaching. Aside from authoring *New Theatres for Old*, he was published in *The Arts, New Theatre, New Masses, Theatre Arts Monthly, Players Magazine*, the *N.Y. Times, Drama Survey, Dramatics, Quarterly Journal of Speech*, the *Encyclopedia Britannica, Encyclopedia Americana, Collier's Encyclopedia* and others. His adaptation of Max Frisch's *Firebug* has enjoyed hundreds of performances. His compilation of plays entitled *Toward a Larger Theatre* was published in 1988.

Gorelik designed sets for the outstanding playwrights of his day. He produced these sets for the most prominent production companies of the day. Gorelik also worked with workers theatres such as the Theatre Collective and the Theatre Union. Although Gorelik designed over thirty Broadway productions, it is perhaps that Gorelik spent so much time Off-Broadway with these politically oriented groups that he has not received the historical attention as some of his contemporaries.

The Group was intended to be an acting company. The emphasis was on the actors, not the stage picture behind them. A difficult task, Gorelik would make the Group understand the need for proper scenery and the complications it presented. His approach was quite consistent, almost deserving of the term "method." Gorelik's most useful attribute might have been his persistence. He had confidence iu his own opinions and as often as it opened doors for him, it sometimes shnt them in his face as well. Yet, to those not intimidated by his eagerness, he was found to be not only hardworking and accommodating but insecure as well. He was fanatically concerned with the quality and accuracy of his imagery. Jones wrote to him, "I was talking about you the other day and I said, 'It isn't Max's theories, it is his nature that shines through.'"

His thoughts of becoming a book illustrator show in his use of iconography. Signs and banners created a vaudeville or burlesque look to his designs. This was his early trademark. Professional Broadway producers shouted, "Nut stuff! When we start doing burlesque shows we'll let you know."

Gorelik acted as a translator for the bellowing Bertolt Brecht as he berated and harassed the directors of the Theatre Union as they attempted to

stage Brecht's *Mother* in 1935. At the time, Gorelik was as unaware of Brecht's theory as was the Theatre Collective's directors. Brecht ranted that they had fumed his script into mellow dramatic garbage, and that Gorelik's set design was nothing short of Bourgeois—the supreme insult! The entire production was reworked. Gorelik would be the first to interpret Epic theatre to the American audience. Although Brecht's philosophies and theories intrigued Gorelik, even then he saw the incompatibility of it with the American audiences. Brecht, without his sympathetic audience at home, tried to lecture his andience in an almost demeaning fashion. As Gorelik had predicted, the production was a very interesting but still a boring flop. They argued about suspense and catharsis, discussed collaborating on play scripts as well as offering to throw one another from the window. While Gorelik is historically accepted as the first in America to articulate and praise Brecht's theories, Gorelik valued his own even more.

A man of great insight, Gorelik developed his own practical theory of scenography. As early as 1922 he had traveled to Europe to see its scenic innovations first hand. It was out of his association with the Group and in particular his woric on the plays of Clifford Odets from which Gorelik based his idea of the Scenic Imagination and the Scenic Metaphor. Thus, while being known historically as a scholar of the early European scene design and the American proponent of Epic theatre, Gorelik's most notable work is as distinctly American as the social drama of Clifford Odets.

Finding those metaphors was sometimes obvious and at other times difficult. Gorelik quoted Mark Twain to emphasize the importance of the search for accuracy, "The difference between the right word and the word that is almost right is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug." Gorelik felt that even if a metaphor did not seem to be working at first, it should be allowed to grow a bit before being tossed aside. All creative minds experience difficulties when attempting to develop a line for a production. If one allows a concept to grow from some obvious ties, more subtle relationships seem to form reinforcing the basic idea. If these more subtle connections do not arise, the original idea seems incomplete and shallow. Often instinct guides the scientific investigation of the designer. Gorelik considered theatre to be as difficult and precise as engineering. Corelik complemented Strasberg's detailed vision and supplemented his methodical pursuit of unity and accuracy in the theatre.

Concerning accuracy, Gorelik studied Gestalt psychology and the phenomenon of attention. He emphasized the study of Contact and Confluent attention. Contact attention takes notice. It has recognition, enthusiasm or possibly repulsion. Most importantly, contact attention is immediate. As Gorelik noticed, some times rejection is more immediate than acceptance. Similarly, at times a mildly accepted thought may erupt into Contact attention at

a later date. Conversely, Gorelik described Confluent attention as a gulping of data as well as associating new ideas to things already known.

Gorelik utilized these concepts in his attempt to reach his audience effectively. Gorelik felt that a desiguer's search for a metaphor was merely a conscience act of doing what the mind of the audience would otherwise do unconsciously, anyway. He was merely anticipating the expectations of the audience for the metaphor they would search for regardless of the designer's intent. From this, Gorelik was convinced the best order of acceptance was a subtle one. For example, it can be argued that Bernard Shaw's audience accepted his opinions through their laughter. Clurman, as well, saw the usefulness of laughter. He thought the truth, "bitter as castor oil," is hard to swallow. By getting someone to laugh, you open their mouths to pour it down. Gorelik felt Brecht's theatre too obvious and less entertaining, thus more difficult to find acceptance from an audience. Epic theatre's intent to make immediate contact with the audience would be rejected by all but the pre-informed and loyal observer.

Gorelik saw importance in understanding attention and acceptance in an andience. Gorelik borrowed from Brecht the concept that the ordinary must appear new, and that everyday life should be re-examined. However, Gorelik was quick to point out that shock for its own sake should be avoided. He felt shock was the "besetting sin" of yesterday's Expressionism, Dadaism, Surrealism and Absurdism. We all must be aware of the difference between insight and mere stunt in what we are viewing. The way to avoid stunts is to demand justification. This gears the play towards the audience. Gorelik felt that while the twentieth century theatre has found beauty in structure, a set should not be mere evidence of a designer's skill. A designer should not reveal his "apparatus" merely for its own sake. According to Gorelik, a set mnst portray its implicity in an evocative metaphorical manner.

Concerning the designer's efforts, Gorelik felt that if left alone, the unconscious mind would eventually awaken. In Gorelik's opinion, true talent combines the gnidance of the practical conscious mind with the uninhibited play of the primitive mind. The conscious mind drags along the bank of old and tried techniques clouding new and nnique creativity. Gorelik felt the first reading of a script was in itself a creative act. While first impressions may not be accurate or workable, they spring forward without the backlog of ideas and experience, which come to mind during later investigation. Gorelik felt these early moments are of great importance, when one considers that in theatre the reliable is generally more trusted than the creative original. The safe bet is for the designer to fall back on his proven technique.

Gorelik was one of the first designers to emphasis a systematic examination of imagery in a text and attempt to associate these images into the physical needs of the staging. Thus, he developed a role for metaphor both practical and idealistic, both visual and physical. This dual nature of the metaphor

can best be seen in his 1938 design for Robert Ardrey's *Casey Jones*. The message of the play was that men love their machines and are, therefore, captured by them. The staging was an active participant. Gorelik designed a throne-like locomotive for the hero. It was built in forced perspective borrowing Meyerhold's "angle of the obliqne." Gorelik designed the other scene, a boarding house interior, as a visual and physical foil. Casey entered the room down a narrow set of stairs and literally had to duck under steam and water pipes along the ceiling. *Theatre Arts Monthly* noted Gorelik's move "further leftward and propagandistic. Realism has now been lifted right out of itself that it may become a more potent factor in the solution of social problems."

Upon Gorelik's return to the Group, he staged the Group's most successful production, *Golden Boy*, as well as *Casey Jones*. They were the two productions of their seventh season together. Gorelik was confident with the Group. His return was a success. Again, the Group followed up a commercial success with a flop, but Casey's locomotive was Gorelik's most notable design. It was the hit of the reviews.

Gorelik and the Group

Gorelik asked questions which needed answers. How will the actors move? Is the stage picture more important than the actors are? Will there be subtleties to overpower or to accentuate? Is there a texture to the performance which should be attributed to the set as well? Is the playing space to be ample or condensed? Should actors be pronounced by their environment or blend into it? They are obvious questions, yes. However, they are all too often ignored. Gorelik often said he learned more about scenery watching actors than by studying color, light and construction. The great European designers were considered masters for this type of approach to space and imagery. The American designers too often were considered troublesome and meddling for practicing similar approaches. Gorelik spoke of a Broadway theatre where success was considered unconscious and incomprehensible. Producers shied away from defining a play's "statement" and cringed wheu a director, designer or actor attempted such definition. This mysticism was nothing but poor planning and a lack of time. These productions had no real unity, no agreed viewpoint. They were accidental in their direction. Creative consulting amongst the team was non-existent. Adding to the problem of the designer was the fact that the set, no small expense to the producer, had to be finished before the director and cast fully developed the action of the play. Even with a standardized, conventional set, uncertainty remained until opening night. In the end, the set usually didn't relate to the script or the actors. Sometimes a scene quite intense in rehearsals appeared flat to its opening night audience.

Even the Group could not avoid these pitfalls. An example is the one and only musical the Group produced, *Johnny Johnson*, Kurt Weill's first in America. Donald Oenslager designed a typically flamboyant set, yet the Group actors were not prepared for the results. Their intimately rehearsed scenes were dwarfed by the set. Oenslager was not familiar with working with an ensemble such as the Group. While producers demanded more and more subtlety from their actors, they did not demand it of their designers. Gorelik felt only in a permanent company was this type of cooperation able to develop effectively and consistently. It was Gorelik's experience that the permanent company of the Group Theatre conld eliminate these problems. At the Group a play was a collective artistic effort as well as a statement. All of the personnel were aware of it. This was necessary to communicate it properly to the audience. This direction developed organically throughout rehearsals. At the Group, Gorelik was allowed in on the director's concepts and asked to contribute.

For Gorelik, the ground plan was most important in a Group Theatre undertaking. As it was primarily an acting group, the scenic picture was not as important as the flow of the movement. Gorelik worked closely and in detail on this aspect of his Group sets. A thorough understanding of how a space will be used is a necessity to creating a proper atmosphere for that area. The best fantasy is based on reality, making our creations seem accessible and believable to their audience. The only truly real property of a theatrical set design is the actors, and how they use the setting. Aside from the earthly materials all else is imaginary: the look, the metaphor and the temporary creation of a moment in time. What is truly real for the actors is the ground plan, which allows or constricts their movements. Incorporating nsage into a design brings it from mere two dimensional illusion into three dimensional reality. The audience is stimulated as they see real potentials being presented. For the practical designer, the ground plan is conceived early in the design process.

The audience does the designer the greatest honor when it is aware only of a unified production. To quote Gorelik,

> Theatre is entering on a long struggle to maintain its integrity and freedom of thought, to hold on to its sacred duty of clarifying life. In an effort to remain clear in judgement, it will reach its greatest moral sensitivity, its most scientific accuracy, its most stirring imagination.

The struggle continues, the past is the future. Clurman stated,

> The sets I had Mordecai Gorelik design had very little resemblance to the designated locales. The reason for this is that in reading the two scripts, I did not feel that either of the texts was primarily concerned with the business of boxing or dentistry. Audiences accepted the settings—rather free abstractions—as 'characteristic' of their locale.

Today, many would argue that metaphor is the underlying intent of the visual theatre. Decades of analysis have uncovered many truths and most of the deceptions. The artistic integrity of metaphorical work is universally accepted. Of his contemporaries, only Gorelik can be credited with developing a precise theory with regard to scenic design. His art came to him clearly, demanding it to be documented.

The Group was a very knowledgeable company. This common knowledge brought about clarity of vision. Those who didn't get it at first would soon enough have it instilled into them by the speeches, rehearsals, scripts and, yes, the sets of the Group Theatre. A once distant view was thrust upon the table in the scripts of Odets. What was once a beautiful dream was now a raging reality in the shapes and contours staged by Gorelik. Yet, the theatrical community was not awakened, not ontraged by this dissent. It seems as though many have still never taken notice. The contemporary critics waited patiently for results. Successful or not, the productions yielded results enough. What was Clurman's unknown seriousness turned out to be visual metaphor, social realism and psychological truth.

Theatre was a weapon in the 1930's; never more so in America had theatre been looked at as a vehicle for social change. It was a source of inspiration to its audience. The Group wanted to communicate; they had something to say not just something to sell. Their approach was not purely technical nor was it purely theoretical. It was a little of both and a bridge in between. That is metaphor. It stirs the emotions and suggests the potentials of the future. What so many fail to realize is that the future is the past, and the past is our future. Things move on but are merely a different kind of the same thing. Things gone by have a version today. We all have our yardsticks, yet they simply take on new forms. They are in fact the metaphors of the larger picture so few seem to see through to. Differeuces alienate, while similarities go unnoticed. The practitioners of theatre must appreciate the Group's efforts in this context. They might pale in comparison to today's spectacles, yet they once existed on the same level. Who would not be proud to be today's Group Theatre. The numbers would no doubt astound us. Near the opening of *House of Connelly,* Margaret Barker was asked how long her engagement with the Group would last. She replied, "If the play is a success, twenty years. If the play is a failure, twenty years." How many today would take the risk and refuse more profitable offers?

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Sweeney sings of his upcoming revenge to Mrs. Lovett in the Washington State University production of *Sweeney Todd, The Demon Barber of Fleet Street.*

Northwest Theatre Review, Volume 8 (2000), 35–40

"He Never Forgets and He Never Forgives": *Sweeney Todd* as Jacobean Revenge Tragedy

LAURILYN J. HARRIS

Are we not revenged?
Is there one enemy left alive? (*Revenger's Tragedy*, V, 3)

To seek revenge may lead to hell,
But everyone does it, and seldom as well. (*Sweeney Todd*, Epilogue)

When I began working as Dramaturg on Washington State University's production of *Sweeney Todd*, I initially concentrated on the historical and cultural background of this rather unsettling nineteenth century urban legend, as well as on the unique theatrical and musical elements that identify the show as a product of Sondheim's singular genius. Nevertheless, as rehearsals progressed I began to catch glimpses of a much older dramatic pattern running throughout the script: the unmistakable archetypal design of English Revenge Tragedy.

As a geure, English Revenge Tragedy was pioneered in the Elizabethan period by Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (c. 1589), and perfected in the Jacobean period by distinctive dramas such as Cyril Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy* (c. 1607). The most blatantly obvious characteristic of the form is, of course, the commission of some terrible wrong, past or present, that must be avenged. However, numerous dramas revolve around themes of crime and punishment, yet cannot be classified as Revenge Tragedies. A number of other important ingredients must be present in order to fulfil the strict demands of the formula.

First, the initial crime usually involves the abuse of power by someone so highly placed that the avenger is unable to accomplish his revenge through normal legal channels. Claudius, not Hamlet, is the ultimate authority in Denmark. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hieronimo, as Marshal of Spain,

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has jurisdiction over every court in the land. Unfortunately, members of the royal family, including those who murdered his son, are beyond his reach:

> Nor ought avails it me to menace them
> Who, as a wintry storm upon a plain,
> Will bear me down with their nobility. (III, 13)[1]

Vendice in *The Revenger's Tragedy* is a nobleman, but one without the riches or power to gain ready access to the Duke who poisoned his fiancee. In his society, as in Sweeney's, to be poor is to be "scorned of greatness" (II,1). "You're going to—get 'em? You? A bleeding little nobody of a runaway convict?" says Mrs. Lovett in disbelief; "You'll never get His 'igh and Mightiness!" (I). For her and for Sweeney, Judge Turpin *is* the legal system. The avenger, therefore, cannot merely *await* a suitable opportunity for vengeance, but must actively *create* one.

The environment in which the avenger is forced to operate is not only frustrating, but tainted as well. The depravity which defines the world of the privileged antagonist spreads like a contagious disease, infecting almost everyone who comes in contact with it, "turning beauty into filth and greed" (*Sweeney Todd*, I). Hamlet sees the world in general and the Danish court in particular as:

> . . . an unweeded garden
> That grows to seed. Things rank and gross in nature
> Possess it merely. (I, 2).

Sweeney's London is a moral sewer, where the rich and fashionable view rape as a spectator sport. Lorenzo, the royal villain-in-chief of *The Spanish Tragedy*, casually murders the servants he earlier corrupted, regarding them as less than human (die they shall, slaves are ordain'd to no other end III, 2). The ducal palace in *The Revenger's Tragedy* is a hotbed of licentiousness and sycophancy, in which "all thrives but chastity" (II, 1), and "faiths are bought and sold" on a daily basis (III, 2). In such surroundings, survival often depends on a combination of ruthlessness, lightning reflexes (mental as well as physical), and proficiency in both dissimulation and manipulation. Those without these basic skills, those who are innocent, or tenderhearted, or in any way vulnerable, have no chance. Like Sweeney's Lucy, Vendice's Gloriana and Hamlet's Ophelia, they are crushed and tossed aside:

> So soft
> So young
> So lost (*Sweeney Todd*, I)

"To be honest," says the cynical Vendice, "is not to be i' the world" (I, 1). The rules of that world are simple: kill or be killed; eat or be eaten:

[1]Author's Note: All quotations from *Hamlet*, *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *The Spanish Tragedy* will be cited by act and scene number in this text. Quotations from *Sweeney Todd* will be cited by act number alone.

> For what's the sound of the world out there?
> Those crunching noises pervading the air?
> It's man devouring man, my dear. (*Sweeney Todd*, I)

Those unable to cope die or go mad.

Madness, real or feigned, is in fact a recurrent theme in Revenge Tragedy. Sweeney arrives in London with his sanity in shreds after fifteen years of hell at Botany Bay. Mrs. Lovett's personality quirks go far beyond the level of mere eccentricity. After nine years of brooding over the skull of his "poisoned love," Vendice's mental balance might well be called into question. Constantly out maneuvered, sheer frustration gradually drives Hieronimo into full-blown madness during the course of *The Spanish Tragedy*. Hamlet begins by putting "an antic disposition on" in Act I, but role-playing can ripen into reality in a Revenge Tragedy, and he may be more than "mad in craft" by the time he coufronts Gertrude in Act III. Meanwhile, the deranged images of Lucy, Tobias and Ophelia flit in and out of shadows, adding yet more instability to the revenger's warped and precarious environment.

But the poisonous atmosphere of the revenger's world usually affects more than his sanity. The ghost of Hamlet's father urges his son to avenge his "murder most foul," but also warns him:

> But whomsoever thou pursues this act,
> Taint not thy mind. (I, 5)

This proves impossible, not only for Hamlet, but for almost every protagonist of almost every Revenge Tragedy. As each avenger is drawn farther and farther into the twisted sphere of his antagonist(s), he too becomes corrupted. During the progression of the action, he becomes more and more enmeshed in a web of deceit and treachery until he is as bad—or even worse—than those he pnrsues in the name of justice. He becomes obsessed with his own increasingly sadistic cleverness. Violence proves seductive; disguise proves stimulating. The viciousness of his foe is met more and more often with a viciousness of his own. He who originally set out to eradicate the evils of the world winds up adding to them.

This metamorphosis is often marked by a subtle shift of emphasis from goal to process on the avenger's part. As Mrs. Lovett points out:

> Don't you know,
> Silly man,
> Half the fun is to
> Plan the plan? (I)

Time proves her right, and not just in Sweeney's case. Hieronimo concocts his final, murderous masque with demented zeal, adding on so many extraneous details and unnecessary complications that his prospective victims are initially slightly wary. Hamlet busies himself with an elaborately contrived (and ultimately needless) trap, using the players to expose Claudios' guilt—the direct result of which is to harden the King's resolve to be rid of his

troublesome stepson. Having devised an appropriately gruesome end for the "hot and vicious" old Duke who murdered Gloriana, Vendice is enraged when the second part of his cunning plan (the murder of the Duke's dissolute son) is inadvertently foiled:

> Here was the sweetest occasion, the fittest hour,
> to have made my revenge familiar with him; show
> him the body of the duke his father, and how
> quaintly he died . . . and in catastrophe slay
> him over his father's breast. O, I'm mad to
> lose such a sweet opportunity. (V, 1)

His exasperation seems to spring not so much from the temporary escape of his second victim as from the fact that the exquisite symmetry of his plot has been spoiled. Hamlet throws away his best opportunity to kill Claudius without an immediate uproar, because the situation does not meet his aesthetic and metaphysical requirements:

> Now might I do it pat, now 'a is a-praying,
> And now I'll do't—and so 'a goes to heaven,
> And so am I revenged. That would be scanned.
> A villain kills my father, and for that,
> I, his sole son, do this same villain send
> To heaven.
> Why, this is hire and salary, not revenge.
> . . . . . .
> No.
> Up, sword, and know thou a more horrid hent.
> When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,
> Or in th' incestuous pleasure of his bed,
> At game a-swearing, or about some act
> That has no relish of salvation in't. (III, 4)

On the other hand, he is delighted with his inventive tit-for-tat substitution of his own "grand commission" for that of Claudius. The fact that his two boyhood friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, "go to 't" simply adds to the "joke" and bothers him not at all:

> 'Tis dangerous when the baser nature comes Between the pass and fell
> incensed points Of mighty opposites. (V, 2).

His tone in contemplating their imminent demise matches that of *The Spanish Tragedy's* Lorenzo, a master at the witty but permanent removal of unreliable associates. Sweeney's dream of recovering Johanna dims as he finds more and more satisfaction in his "work": practicing on "less honorable throats," while he schemes to lure Judge Turpin to his shop (and his razor) once again:

> Goodbye, Johanna.
> You're gone and yet you're mine.
> I'm fiue, Johanna,
> I'm fine.
> . . . . . .

> And though I'll think of you, I guess,
> Until the day I die,
> I think I miss you less and less
> As every day goes by. (II)

The protagonist's fixation on his game plan and his consequent indifference to the worth of human life result in another distinctive feature of Revenge Tragedy: the sharp escalation of violence, which eventually escapes even the revenger's control. Each avenger begins his work with a specific, limited target in mind: Sweeney's initial objective is to rid the world of Judge Turpin and Beadle Bamford. Hamlet wants Claudius' head; Vendice wants the Duke's. Hieronimo wishes only to dispatch (legally if possible) the unknown murderers of his son. But the body count grows as the plot unfolds. *Hamlet* ends with a pile of corpses—some intended, others inadvertently eliminated through "purposes mistook." Vendice's final tally includes the Duke, his legitimate son, Lussurioso, his bastard son, Spurio, his three stepsons and assorted bewildered courtiers who found themselves sitting in the wrong place at the wrong time. Hieronimo's revenge unleashes a tide of bloodshed that sweeps away nobles and commoners alike. As for Sweeney, the world has become his abattoir:

> Not one man, no,
> Nor ten men,
> Nor a hundred
> Can assuage me. (I)

Eventually, the relentless logic of the Revenge Tragedy dictates that the final victim must inevitably be the revenger himself. His association with evil has left him both morally compromised and hopelessly estranged from the rest of humanity. He who has served as judge, jury and executioner is now forced to pass judgment on himself. Hamlet, the most introspective of the protagonists considered here, looks at the bloody remains of his broken world and craves only the "felicity" of his rapidly approaching death. Hieronimo, his mind completely shattered, commits suicide in a final paranoid frenzy, leaving as his legacy a dazed group of his victims' grieving relatives, who are as innocent of wrongdoing as he himself was when his own son was murdered. Vendice and his brother, Hippolito, have become so ethically obtuse that they expect applause when they finally brag openly about their witty and "well-managed" murder of the recently deceased Duke. They are stunned when the new Duke, a morally upright nobleman with a strong sense of self-preservation, condemns them to "speedy execution." Realizing that they have outlived their purpose, they pragmatically conclude that "'Tis time to die, when we're ourselves our foes" (V, 3).

In *Sweeney Todd*, the standard fate of revenger-protagonists seems to be neatly summed up at the end of Act I:

> No, we all deserve to die!
> Tell you why, Mrs. Lovett,

Tell you why:
Because the lives of the wicked should be—
Made brief.
For the rest of us, death
Will be a relief—
We all deserve to die!

However, fate has reserved one final, ironic twist for the Demon Barber of Fleet Street at the end of Act II. After Sweeney's devious and demented planning apparently culminates in an orgy of blood-drenched success, he finds himself staring at the essence of his own damnation summarized in a single word: "naive." Despite his hard-won knowledge of the innate treachery of his fellow man, he has once again been gullible; has once again trusted the wrong person; and has once again lost the only human being he has ever really loved—this time dispatched by his own hand. Then the razor he thought could safely "rest now forever" is picked up by another avenger, and Sweeney is dispatched in turn. The dark and hungry god he has served so faithfully has claimed him at last, as it has so many other inhabitants of the perverted world of the Revenge Tragedy.

There's none of these wiles that ever
come to good: I see now, there's nothing
sure in mortality, but mortality. (*The Revenger's Tragedy*, III, 5)

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