

2015

The Western States Theatre Review, Volume 21, 2015

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(2015) "The Western States Theatre Review, Volume 21, 2015," *The Western States Theatre Review*: Vol. 21 , Article 1.
Available at: <https://cedar.wvu.edu/wstr/vol21/iss1/1>

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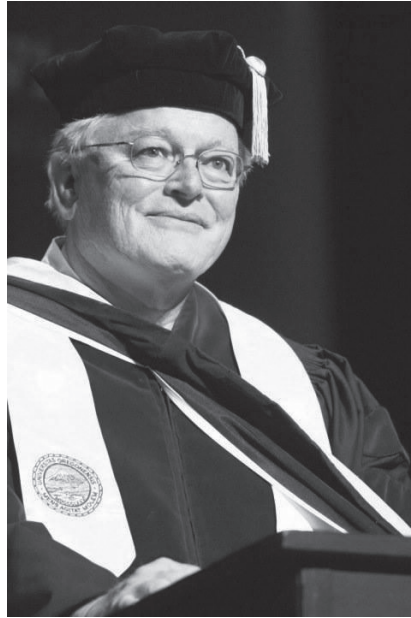
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This issue of *The Western States Theatre Review*
is dedicated to the life, work and memory of
JACK WATSON, 1942–2014
member of the University of Oregon Theatre Arts faculty
and invaluable officer of KCACTF.



Jack Watson passed away in Honolulu on July 7 with his husband, Rick Turnbow, and sister-in-law, Carrie Perry, at his bedside.

Jack received his B.A. from Lewis and Clark College and his Ph.D. from the University of Oregon. He taught for many years at McMinnville High School, and in 1987 he joined the faculty at the University of Oregon, where he taught courses in directing and theatre history, advised several graduate projects and led the London Study Abroad program. In 1990, Jack received the university's prestigious Ersted Award for Distinguished Teaching. From 1995 to 2001, Jack served as departmental chair.

Jack directed over thirty productions for the University of Oregon as well as for Lane Summer Musical Theatre, Oregon State University and Gallery Theatre in McMinnville.

Jack served as KCACTF VII President, participated on the National Selection Team and was twice recipient of the KCACTV Gold Medallion.

After retiring to Hawaii in 2011, Jack became active with the Waimea Community Theatre and the Kohala Animal Relocation and Education Service.

Jack Watson is remembered by his family, friends, thousands of students whose lives he touched and his KCACTF colleagues, who remain grateful to have shared their time with him.

THE WESTERN STATES THEATRE REVIEW

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Publication Designer: Cheryl McLean, ImPrint Services, Corvallis, Oregon

Printer Melissa Murphy-Terry, Lynx Group, Inc., Salem, Oregon

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The Western States Theatre Review is a regional journal intended to publish works by or about regional theatre scholars and practitioners. Our goal is to provide a means by which to share the discoveries and accomplishments of our vast, highly productive region as exemplified by the diverse topics contained in this issue. All contributions are of vital importance to our region and may encompass topics as wide ranging as playwriting, community college issues, theatre for youth and international theatre. Please submit projects, articles, reports and short playscripts to the editor. Submissions as electronic attachments by e-mail will be accepted at any time during the year. The deadline for the upcoming issue is November 15.

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Full page (4.5" w x 7.25" h)—\$75 per issue • Half page (4.5" w x 3.5" h)—\$50 per issue

Submit material and inquiries to George Caldwell, Theatre, School of Arts and Communication, Oregon State University, Corvallis, OR 97331.

KENNEDY CENTER AMERICAN COLLEGE THEATRE FESTIVAL REGION VII

The Western States Theatre Review is published in February by the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival Region VII. Registration in the festival includes a subscription to the *Review*. Individual copies of *The Western States Theatre Review* may also be obtained throughout the year by contacting the editor at george.caldwell@oregonstate.edu.

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The Western States Theatre Review, Volume 21 (2015), 1–22

Comic Catharsis: The Power of Pacifist Performance¹

ANDREW RYDER

Cleansed
by a revived sense of the comic
I return
whistling a theme from Prokofiev.²

Carnival laughter is the laughter of all the people....it is universal in scope;
it is directed at all and everyone, including the carnival's participants.³

People who camp use satire and parody to bring attention to what
they see as incongruencies and double standards within conventional
notions of the natural, the normal, the sincere, and the moral.⁴

Introduction: Comic Catharsis

During World War II, a group of pacifists interned in Civilian Public Service⁵ (CPS) camps in Oregon created a large variety of art in many genres and styles, including a number of theatrical performances. Among these performances was a pair of satires performed in 1942 and 1944 at the Wyeth camp at Cascade Locks, Oregon, on the Columbia River. Both works were written by conscientious objector (CO) Kermit Sheets, a teacher, poet and actor from central California, with fellow CPS artists, and reveal a great deal about the COs' lives in CPS, as well as these artists' aspirations for pacifism, art and a new kind of world. In each play, idealism is blended with sharp satire and critique. These dramas are striking examples of parodies in the *carnival* vein described by Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin. For these pacifists who had chosen this particular brand of alternative service, these comic performances functioned to create a special kind of time, which "celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order."⁶

Andrew Ryder, PhD., is Professor and Chair of the Department of Theatre, Seattle Pacific University in Washington

COs living and working at Camp Wyeth were rarely officially *liberated* (they did receive occasional furloughs or leaves depending on the work load), but they found moments of liberation in individual and group experiences. Kermit Sheets wrote about a personal one in his 1943 poem, “Katharsis at Wyeth.” I quote just part of it here:

Frustrated by the mechanized arm of the state
by the church sold to the state
by expedience
by the habit of learned emotions
here
I seek release.

I meet no one
but the drop of the precipice
and the river below
—a fleeting temptation
ending in laughter
loud
wild
cock-eyed laughter
at the stupidity of man’s self-seriousness

Cleansed
by a revived sense of the comic
I return
whistling a theme from Prokofiev.⁷

Sheets’ poem describes his experience of being reminded of the comic, or ultimately hopeful, reality of his and the other COs’ situation. He is at once performer and audience, laughing at the incongruity of his character and given circumstances. And he frames this experience as a kind of cleansing, much like catharsis.

Comedy, and in particular satire, as a genre has power to affect society. As Shannon Hengen has written, “To approach comedy...as *performance* is to insist that it is active, that it does something specific and concrete within culture.”⁸ To embody literally that comic spirit, as these performances did, is to do the real work of energizing, inspiring and challenging participants and audiences through those bodies on stage. In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin reminds us that laughter is “a vital factor in laying down that prerequisite for fearlessness without which it would be impossible to approach the world realistically.”⁹

Both performances featured cross-dressing, as they were performed by casts of all men.¹⁰ As such, they capitalized on the potential power of *camp*, which includes, but is of course not limited to, drag performance. As

Wayne Dynes writes, camp “serves to deconstruct the cult of seriousness”¹¹ surrounding the subject being imitated. Camp elements of parody and satire connected the audience with the performance through *in jokes* about life in CPS, allowing them to feel a sense of power and superiority, however brief, in the midst of their involuntary isolation. And they hoped that their work might have power to make changes, pointing out “incongruencies and double standards”¹² in the management of CPS. Neither does camp ignore its own foibles in its comic criticism. Wayne Dynes writes that “camp narrows the distance between performer and victim” and reminds us that “camp tolerantly views everyone as imperfect, but eminently salvageable.”¹³ So we see in the satires under consideration that the comic types enacted include many different groups of COs not just the camp supervisors.

In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Mikhail Bakhtin describes the characteristics and history of “Menippean satire,” a genre which he identifies as an ancestor of the carnival and the novel in its blend of genres and lack of fixed rules. Among these characteristics are: “underworld naturalism;” “scenes of eccentric behavior;” “sharp contrasts and oxymoronic combinations;” “wide use of other genres;” and “topicality.”¹⁴ Each of these elements is present to some degree in the parodies under discussion and will be described and analyzed within each work. Working with some of the tools of camp, these performances managed to create a powerful and enduring emotional response I am calling comic catharsis. This hopeful outcome draws on Jill Dolan’s concept of the “utopian performative,” analogous to Victor Turner’s “communitas.” Dolan writes that the “temporary community” created by performance can make an audience “citizens of a no-place that’s a better place, citizens who might then take that feeling into other sites of public discourse.”¹⁵

If the result of these performances is a kind of catharsis, how does it compare with Aristotle’s articulation of the term in reference to tragedy? I see the comic form as still related to pity and fear but in different ways. First, there is a clearer connection between the audience and the performer, so rather than pity there is a sense of empathy and identification. Fear is shared as well because of common experience. So, as Sheets describes his



Figure One: Kermit Sheets and Del Vaniman in an unidentified 1942 performance Special Collections, Henry & Mary Blocher Collection of Civilian Public Service Photographs, D47

own experience on the riverside cliff, both pity and fear are done away with, providing the potential for action to build a different future. Participating in these performances purged the pity of feeling sorry for oneself and the fear of trying something new. They purged the pity of doubting the potential of one individual, replacing it with the encouragement of the group taking action together. They purged the fear of becoming a tool of the oppressor through laughing at the oppressor and victim alike and their implication in a ridiculous situation: one that could be changed.

By creating satirical camp performances with carnival elements, Sheets and his colleagues affected themselves and their fellow COs in three specific ways. First, they provided all of the COs with some relief from their frustration and isolation by reminding them what they had in common, even when it was the common enemy of Selective Service. Second, they had the potential of correcting mistaken assumptions about the COs and about pacifists generally among the people living nearby. Finally, the COs hoped that their work as a whole—even their very presence as resisters of war—might provide the larger society with a picture of an alternative way of living which did not depend on armed conflict. They wanted to “take that feeling” of community and resistance “into other sites.”¹⁶

Arguably, the goals for the COs within the camp were achieved to a large degree, as these and other performances were well-received, and the camps were for the most part tolerated by the surrounding communities. These performances offered the participants and audiences a powerful laughter, a kind of comic catharsis, which could help them to envision a different future, a future in which they would work together to take action and make a difference. This laughter also allowed them to see and imagine the ways in which their current work, including their artistic work, was already changing the world simply by its existence as an alternative to the mainstream view. I argue that the unique and interrelated carnival tools of parody, satire, and camp created an energetic space of resistance to the rules and authorities under which these COs were interned. This resistance bore fruit in numerous ways after the war, as former CPS men went out



Figure Two: Kermit Sheets (?) in a photo labeled “Cross Dresser” Special Collections, Kermit Sheets Collection, Box 4, #S35

to do the work of rebuilding the world: structurally, philosophically, and artistically, empowered by the shared experience of comic catharsis.¹⁷

Example One: *Stalingrad Stalemate*

With fellow CO Harry Prochaska (credited as “Sir Pro Hack”), who also played a role in the premiere production, Sheets (as “krmtt zhiitzh”) wrote *Stalingrad Stalemate* in 1942.¹⁸ This short *play*, which was presented October 19, 1942, is subtitled “a ukrainium in three acts” and ostensibly illustrates “certain aspects of the Russian temperament and how these aspects are being manifest in the history-making siege”¹⁹ of that city by the Axis powers. Writing one year later, Prochaska called it “the first active step taken by those men—other than talk—in the pursuit of a conviction”²⁰ (Prochaska, “Introduction”), suggesting parallels between the seemingly inactive Russians and the similarly “stuck” COs. The play was performed by a cast of male COs and featured co-author Prochaska in drag as the wife.

Stalingrad Stalemate is a kind of Menippean satire and a parody of Russian literary stereotypes. Act One is entitled, “The Rites of Spring,” and consists of one continuous stage direction. A musician plays a violin, an ill man coughs in bed, another man drinks, and a woman prepares “borsch” and knits. Eventually, “a simple boy” cares for the consumptive man, giving him water and rubbing his feet. The woman’s husband, described as a “rough man,” comes home, treats everyone poorly, eats, and all the other actions continue (Prochaska, *Stalingrad* 5-6). Images of production in Figures Four and Five suggest the “underworld naturalism” associated with Stanislavsky’s production of Gorky’s *Lower Depths* in the simple and drab set, literally papered with the topical news of the day, which is seen most clearly in the title page, reproduced as Figure Three. This act’s specific naturalistic features include the consumptive, the drunk, and the foot rubbing. This is certainly a scene of “eccentric behavior,”²¹ and points to other art forms and genres through its title and its characters. The title evokes Stravinsky’s 1913 ballet and the controversy surrounding its premiere, while the characters are drawn from Dostoevsky’s novels and Chekhov’s plays.

Act Two, “The Love of Three Orchards,” satirizes Prokofiev’s comic opera and Chekhov’s *Cherry Orchard*. As this act opens, most of the first act actions continue, but the “simple boy” is missing, occasioning the first dialogue of the play:

THE WOMAN:	(impatiently) He was only an idiot.
THE MAN:	(correcting her) He was a great idiot.
THE WOMAN:	All right, he was a great idiot. All the better he should die. Good riddance, I say. (7)

Here we have an “oxymoronic combination,” as the two agree that the boy was both “great” and an “idiot,” simultaneously evoking Dostoevsky’s novel of the same name. They continue in this vein, addressing one another with changing and increasingly complicated names (among them Daria Alexandrovna, Ivanovitch Koshniev, and Tatiana Tcherbatskaya) and conclude that the boy is better off. Then they turn to the man’s “three orchards,” which he is in danger of losing. He laments: “without the cherry orchards my life has no meaning for me, and if they must be sold, then for the sake of the little father in heaven, sell me too!” On this, the woman smacks him across the face to stop his whining, and the act ends as “The drunk drinks to Anya Ranevsky.”²² Whether this is intended as a specific (and mainly unplayable, without additional dialogue) reference to the lead character in Chekhov’s *Cherry Orchard*, or as yet another name for the woman, the parody for a reader is unmistakable.²³ Though *Stalingrad Stalemate*’s performance is the primary focus of my attention here, the printed version (which was created after the performance) clearly assumes an astute reader who will appreciate such stage directions as: “the consumptive coughs as if he had nothing to live for, coughs thoughtfully as if he were thinking of something to die for.”²⁴ No audience member would necessarily understand these successive coughs in this particular way, but the reader can enjoy the way the details parody Russian literary stereotypes.

The final act is the longest and is titled for a new character, “lieutenant skwijji.”²⁵ This character’s comic name evokes both the window-cleaning tool and Prokofiev’s 1933 score for the film *Lieutenant Kijé*, which tells the story of the imaginary Russian officer repeatedly promoted following a bureaucratic mistake. As it opens, the musician is playing (perhaps something by Prokofiev?) and the man and woman are dancing. A knock comes at the door; when it is opened a lieutenant appears, whom the man describes as “our dear benefactor.”²⁶ The man offers to pay the lieutenant what they owe in order to avoid selling the orchards. He reports that the dying man (his father) has had a vision of the dead boy, who told him to sell a family sword in order to keep the land and trees. As part of this vision, the boy reports on what heaven is like, a suggestion that “the Russian soul” will find relief or release in the afterlife: “No one is coughing; no one is fiddling; no one is drinking; no one is sweeping; no one *is*. It is beautiful here....”²⁷ The lieutenant, however, demands “I must have your land.”²⁸

Lieutenant Skwijji explains that with their land, eventually “the old, the happy, the romantic Russia of the dear little father”²⁹ will be restored after “the enemy” defeats the evil Soviet army by marching “through your orchards at night into Stalingrad by the back entrance.”³⁰ Apparently, the lieutenant reports, “The Leader” (Hitler) “is the son of a cousin of the Cza-

rina and a Mr. Kosherstein who came to paint the royal stables” who will restore “all the Russias back to the dear little father’s nephew who is now headwaiter at the Ritz in New York.”³¹ The layers of irony are particularly thick here, as Hitler is seen as descended from both the Russian and the Jewish races he seeks to exterminate, and in favor of restoring “Mother Russia” rather than taking it over. This certainly qualifies as another of Bakhtin’s “oxymoronic combinations.”³²

The man resists at the risk of having the armies march over his grandfather’s grave, the location of which he has lost. The dying man in the bed interrupts, grabbing all the attention, because this is the first time he’s spoken. He reports that the march can go forward, because the buried ancestor is not the man’s grandfather. In fact, the dying man confesses—à la *The Importance of Being Earnest* or Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus*—“I was a foundling”³³ and dies. The man is shocked, but agrees to sign at the urging of his wife and the lieutenant. On signing, he calls out, “Death for the Soviets,” echoed by the lieutenant’s “Über alles.” Suddenly, the drunk kills both men, then passes out. The woman, left alone, takes on the characteristics of each of the figures in turn, singing, coughing and rubbing the dead man’s feet.³⁴

The text does not fully commit to either a sympathetic or a critical perspective on these Russian characters. Though of course Wyeth’s pacifists were opposed to the siege itself as part of a war they objected to, it is not clear whether this picture of the Russian character is intended to offer reasons why the Russian defenses will hold, to poke fun at the ludicrous idea of holding on to land for land’s sake, even at the expense of life and property, or, more likely, a mix of both. This balance is supported by the ending: a drunk character kills the characters on both sides of the play’s conflict over land, even once they have agreed to terms. No matter which army marches through what orchard, they suggest, Russians will go on, as the first act concludes, with “Music. Coughing. Drinking. Knitting. Belching.”³⁵ Clearly the intent is to point out the laughable qualities of such stereotypes and the sad realities of peasant life in wartime, evoking contemporary comparisons with Brecht’s *Mother Courage*. Beyond that, this entertainment suggests something of the repetitive reality of daily life for the COs at Cascade Locks,

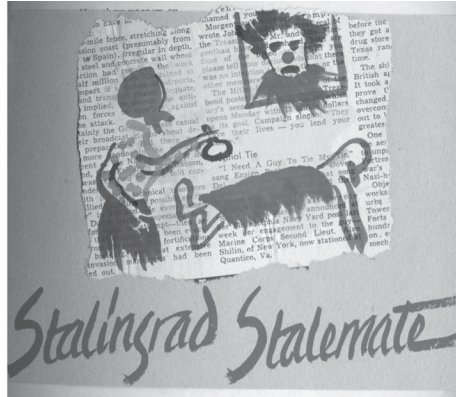


Figure Three: *Stalingrad Stalemate* cover page
Kermit Sheets Collection, Box 5, Folder 3.

which probably included a fair amount of (at least) music, coughing, and belching, if perhaps less drinking or knitting.

Stalingrad is primarily a parody of Russian literary masters and their style, particularly Dostoevsky and Chekhov. As such, it is significantly removed from the realities of war, as the COs themselves were. The literary parody engaged and entertained the CO audience, particularly as it featured fellow COs in all of the parts, including cross-dressing co-author Harry Prochaska as the *pigeon*, or wife, of the main character, who “with stolid, stupid, matter-of-factness, slouched around the stage,”³⁶ calling attention to the constructed nature of literary and gender stereotypes simply by embodying them. Most of the features of this play line up with Bakhtin’s elements of satire and carnival: it is clearly comic, naturalistic, fantastic, eccentric, making extensive use of other genres and their stereotypes. As such, the performance had the potential of carnival to give its participants an experience which temporarily reversed their imprisoned position and gave them hope through the “permanent corrective of laughter,”³⁷ mainly founded in the literary and musical stereotypes and the pleasure the audience took from recognizing them. For this play’s performers, audience and readers, comic catharsis came as they bonded over their shared impression of the ridiculousness of war, the ridiculousness of their own situation, and their desire to build a different world when it was finally over.

COs almost certainly felt as helpless as the characters in the play, who are almost entirely acted upon, stuck and predetermined. It is clear, though, that the creators intended to have a good time and to entertain



Figures Four and Five: *Stalingrad Stalemate* production photos. Lewis and Clark Library Special Collections

their audiences. In an undated letter from Kermit Sheets, written shortly after the performance to what seems to have been a list of unnamed correspondents, he confirms the creators' intent. Presumably, it was a duplicated form letter, as it is in typescript and opens simply with "Hi!" Even this letter itself emphasizes the monotony of CPS in a comic manner: where the date on the letter would appear is typed "Just like every other day." The short letter contains a brief description of the set, costumes and Prochaska's performance, as well as selected quoted comments from the audience. But Sheets particularly calls attention to the joy the creators found in pushing the satire: "Part of the fun was the coincidence of our drama and the #21 advisory board which still has Mennonites on it. Whee! We put extra bounce into it for their benefit."³⁸ Here he is referring to a group overseeing the camp, which had initially been managed by both Mennonite and Brethren churches. The Mennonites were less likely to be sympathetic to (or perhaps even understand) the parody of *Stalingrad*. In an interview late in his life, Sheets remembered the development of *The Mikado in CPS* in a similar vein, describing it as "a lark" and "a fun thing to do."³⁹

Apart from the "fun," though, these COs were serious about their pacifist convictions. Writing in the introduction to a collection by Sheets called "Acirema Stories,"⁴⁰ Harry Prochaska concluded:

If art is a presentation of one's view of life, and one is a pacifist, then an important link should exist between pacifism and art forms. Not for a minute should art become the propaganda of pacifism, nor should it concentrate on making the pacifist element central to one's philosophy, but the interaction between the two should enrich each.⁴¹

A fine line, to be sure, but while silly, *Stalingrad Stalemate* points us to serious ideas, perhaps more effectively because of its humor. Prochaska thought that Sheets' stories were "suggestive of what man might become were his devotions human centered and his understanding enlarged."⁴² *Stalingrad* had a somewhat different purpose, and yet it points us toward that kind of idealized picture of humanity, and through camp performance, created and strengthened its pacifist community.

Example Two: *The Mikado in CPS*

In early 1944, as part of what Jeffrey Kovac calls a "February party,"⁴³ the camp was treated to a performance of Kermit Sheets' parody of *The Mikado*, retitled *The Mikado in CPS*.⁴⁴ Sheets had rewritten many of the lyrics to create a short show which entertained an audience of COs and visiting women from Portland and Seattle. The play traveled to Waldport with Sheets that summer when his transfer was approved, and was performed with a three-man cast as part of the monthly celebration for those who had birthdays in July.⁴⁵ *Mikado* offers some clear glimpses of the realities of life

for pacifists in wartime, particularly when the war is seen as so absolutely right and necessary. It's difficult to do the show justice in writing alone, but many of Gilbert and Sullivan's tunes are probably familiar to readers, as they no doubt were to the CPS audience. Sheets' rewritten lyrics and slightly altered structure reveal the power of satire to make a group's aims clear (in this case the COs' critique of CPS) and to describe accurately (and hilariously) that group to themselves and to others. As Menippean satire, *Mikado in CPS* was certainly topical, presenting the daily lives of the COs enacted in the midst of an operetta. There were probably few moments of naturalism in this case, but comic and serious genres blurred in places, and contrasts and eccentricity were to be seen throughout.

Sheets' *Mikado* begins as the original does, with the rousing introduction song, "If You Want to Know Who We Are." Instead of "gentlemen of Japan" in their various poses, he gives us the pacifists in the recognizable setting of a CPS camp:

If you want to know who we are,
 We are co's in C P S.
 While the rest of the world's at war,
 We the pacifist life profess.
 We're in love with our fellow man,
 Whether yellow or black or tan—
 We'll save the world if we can.
 ...
 If you think we are worked by strings
 Like the military rank and file,
 Then you don't understand these things:
 We are going the second mile.
 On many a project crew
 We do what we're told to do
 No matter who tells us to
 ...⁴⁶

This opening song offers both a picture of what was important to COs and a willing parody of their situation and their character. It must have been great fun for the COs to see their own situation on stage, sung in comic fashion to these recognizable tunes. It's even possible to imagine them singing along. And this willingness to poke as much fun at themselves as at individual groups or at Selective Service, matches Bakhtin's description of carnival and Dynes' definition of camp cited above. Throughout this satire, much of the laughter, in fact, comes from the COs recognizing themselves onstage.

In Sheets' plot, Nanki Poo, here the son of the Director of Selective Service, is attempting to "hide out" in CPS in order to avoid marrying Katisha, the woman his father has chosen for him. When he enters, he sings "A Drafted CO, I" making the case that he is a sincere pacifist:

But if pacifistic sentiment is wanted,
I've pacifistic ballads cut and dried;
For wherever C P S camps may be planted,
Nonviolence in all its forms is tried.⁴⁷

Sheets seems to have started with the songs, probably beginning with the opening one, and then stitched them together with a CPS-related plot, doing away with many of the more extreme complications, particularly the threat of execution and the penalties for flirting. Instead of Lord High Executioner, Ko Ko is simply the "acting assistant director"⁴⁸ of the camp, about to marry Yum Yum, Nanki Poo's beloved. In his introductory song, the chorus describes Ko Ko as:

A pacifist of doubtful rank and title,
A dignified, though impotent officer,
Whose functions aren't particularly vital.⁴⁹

Probably the most insightful song is "I've Got a Little List," in which Ko Ko suggests, not which enemies he hopes to execute, but which COs he can count on going "I A O," that is, choosing noncombatant military service instead of CPS, "who never would be missed."⁵⁰ This turns out to be the primary goal of Sheets' Mikado, the Director of Selective Service: to get as many COs as possible to provide noncombatant military service. This is interesting in its own right, indicating that the COs believed Selective Service didn't really want the headache of CPS at all. But most useful is Ko Ko's actual "list," with descriptions of many of the "types" inhabiting Cascade Locks and other CPS camps. Some are just as likely to be found in a military barracks, such as "the cheerful riser in the dorm" and "the guy prolonging meetings, of all talk monopolist,"⁵¹ but most are quite specific to CPS, such as "the dogmatic socialist...Who proves everything by Thomas, Debs, the Call and Kreuger [*sic*], too" and:

There's the gruesome culture vulture, and all others of his ilk,
Who has gone surrealistic in a dressing gown of silk;
The fussy vegetarian who faints at sight of stew,
He's quite evangelistic and explains it all to you,
And of each dish he asks the cooks, "Of what does this consist?"

...

Now I must not conclude this list unless I mention here
The confirmed religionist, I've got him on the list—
He has the only key to truth and universal bliss,

...

And there are those who have the plan to rescue all mankind...⁵²

In these descriptions, Sheets is willing to parody himself and other artists, probably seen by others as "culture vultures," as well as the vegetarians, who, at least at Waldport, were quite often the artists.⁵³

The other two groups pictured represent the ideological extremes of CPS: the “confirmed religionist” and “the dogmatic socialist.” While CPS was ostensibly only for those who expressed a religious motivation for their pacifism, many COs had not indicated any religious affiliation when applying but were approved by their local draft boards or on appeal because of their apparent sincerity or some other reason. For them, the pervasive religious atmosphere of the camps was oppressive. For COs out of the sponsoring churches, particularly the Brethren, a small, primarily Midwestern denomination, the presence of these ideological pacifists was a revelation. As Ernest Barr says,

There were all kinds of people. That was an introduction to life. I went there naively thinking that everybody was there because they were religious conscientious objectors. I couldn't have been more wrong. There were...Jehovah's Witnesses...vegetarians...political objectors...Socialists and whatever....It was a broadening experience for a kid like me.⁵⁴

Within the camps, ideological conflicts sometimes arose between these extremes over such issues as the pressing concern about how to interact with the Forest Service, which supervised the campers' work cutting trees and fighting fires. So-called “second-milers” advocated doing all they were asked and more, some even literally volunteering for double shifts, while many ideological pacifists ended up “walking out” in protest of any work for government agencies,

believing anything short of direct protest indicated support of the US government and its military pursuits. It is possible that members of these different factions laughed most at the caricature of their opponents, but ideally, the fact that everyone was parodied equally should have brought them all closer together, at least temporarily, sharing the *winking* knowledge behind the words and their *campy* presentation. It's not difficult to imagine each of the groups being characterized by the performers during Ko Ko's song.

Sheets' characterization also included those outside CPS who sympathized with the COs. *Mikado's* trio of “maids from school” provided him the opportunity to parody the sympathetic young women who, probably for both ideological and romantic reasons, visited CPS camps. The group



Figure Six: Kermit Sheets, Kemper Nomland, and Manche Langley dancing, Waldport, 1944. Kermit Sheets Collection, Box 4, #S65

of women from Portland and Seattle who attended the special weekend at Cascade Locks in February, 1944 was treated to a picture of themselves onstage, performed by male COs in drag.⁵⁵ The trio sings:

Three little co-op girls are we,
Straight from the university,
We're not averse to matrimony,
Three little co-op girls.
YUM YUM: We are the girls who co-operate.
PEEP BO: One of our mottoes is educate.
PITTI SING: Give us a chance to demonstrate.
TRIO: Three little co-op girls.
Three little girls on a more or less tramp
Visit the nearest C P S camp.
Willing to be a pitiless vamp—
Three little co-op girls,
Three little co-op girls.⁵⁶

It seems likely that some degree of audience interaction might have taken place during this song as the performers pointed out or flirted with the actual women visiting for the performance.

At this point, Yum Yum and Nanki Poo meet, explain themselves and are suddenly reunited after Nanki Poo declares “I really love you”:

YUM YUM: I know you do and I forgive you for not writing and I'll marry you instead of that pompous old acting assistant director, this very evening, even if he's a full-fledged pacifist and you aren't.⁵⁷

In addition to justifying his own simplified plot, in Nanki Poo's genuine identity Sheets gives us a picture of one more group of people surrounding CPS: curious, but nonsympathetic, outsiders. In an insert to the June 20, 1942 issue of the camp newspaper, *The Columbian*, the editors reprinted an editorial from the local newspaper describing “the reaction of a representative group of businessmen and legionnaires after a visit to the Wyeth [Cascade Locks] conscientious objector camp.”⁵⁸ Their analysis offers insights both into the preconceived notions of those around the camp and into their impressions of the actual situation:

A bunch of millionaire's sons, afraid to fight. A bunch of crackpots, religious zealots, long-haired fanatics. Sissies who speak in high tenor voices and are addicted to paint, powder, and perfume. Yes, the general public has all of these conceptions about conscientious objectors. They are social outcasts, insofar as a war-conscious public is concerned, and they know it. Yet each and every one of these commonly held impressions is wrong, in the main. There are some wealthy men at Wyeth; there are some crackpots and zealots, and there may be a sissy or two, but by and large one could not find a more intelligent, more profoundly religious, more sincere group of young men anywhere in the country than at Camp Wyeth.⁵⁹

These businesspeople came away from their conversation “with a feeling of greater respect for the ‘COs’ than they had on arrival,” though they concluded that “in this world of aggression, hate, and striving by dictators for world domination, the United States could not long endure as a nation if everyone had such ideas.”⁶⁰ Nanki Poo is perhaps more sympathetic than these locals but is enough like them to offer the audience a picture of yet another group who likely was represented in their midst. In fact, Sheets may well have chosen *Mikado* and this particular approach for the very reason that it gave him and his collaborators the opportunity to include, implicate and parody all types in one show. His comments above about the Mennonites watching *Stalingrad* suggest that he might have had this sort of goal in mind.

However, had that group of local businessmen attended the production of *Mikado* in CPS nearly two years later, they might have come to different conclusions, as they saw each of the stereotypical groups they expected to find performed in broad caricature. The script continues with a section parodying the pacifists’ sympathies with Gandhi: In the place of the “Miya sama” chorus of the *Mikado*’s followers, Sheets creates the following song:

Satyagraha, satyagraha,
Gandhi, Tolstoi and Thoreau:
These our saints; and this our motto:
Violence must go—work for peace,
Work for peace for friend or foe.⁶¹

Instead of a triumphant entry song, Sheets’ chorus of CPS COs both identifies their heroes and pokes fun at themselves and their devotion to their secular ideological guides. However, in “My Object All Sublime,” the Director of Selective Service explains his quite serious purpose: “To make each c o understand / A modification of classification / Would make his fortunes expand.” Ultimately, he wants to “see that each c o / Goes 1 A or 1 A O.”⁶²

Next is a scene where Yum Yum convinces Ko Ko to woo Katisha in order to get Nanki Poo off the hook. He does so with an update of “Willow, titwillow, titwillow,” now entitled “Women and Women and Women.” Here none of the original words is used, and the situation is completely unique to the CPS setting which makes it worth quoting the whole song:

In a bleak C P S camp a c o exclaimed,
“I want women and women and women.”
In existence monastic, he couldn’t be blamed
To want women and women and women.
But his betters began this sad chap to deride,
His desires were abnormally sexed, they implied,
While he simply expressed each man’s thoughts when he sighed,
“I want women, and women, and women.”

Now they listened awhile to that bostrich's dirge:
"I want women and women and women."
Till the gradually decided to cure his urge
For women and women and women.
A psychiatrist's mental exam he must take;
Said the doc, "No 4-F, I pronounce you a fake."
Back in camp, out on project, he died in a shake,
Groaning "Women, yes, women, just women."

Now I feel that's as normal as normal can be
To want women, yes, women, just women.
With this pacifist's hunger I clearly agree:
I want women and women and women.
And if you remain callous and obdurate, I
Shall perish as he did, and you will know why,
For I probably also shall moan as I die,
"Give me women, just women, more women."⁶³

Here Ko Ko does not offer a particularly compelling argument: he's basically saying she should pick him, because he's sex-starved, or because he threatens to kill himself if she doesn't. But Katisha quickly agrees, shouting, "No! You mustn't! I'll marry you."⁶⁴

More importantly, the song illustrates several elements of the COs' condition. First, they did not see women that often. This is to some extent an overstatement, as some of the men were married and their wives lived in nearby Portland or closer. And at the very performance being given, a number of women were visiting, providing a second level of "wooing" of the crowd by the COs. In fact, the element of drag performance and camp style was probably intended in part to call attention to the men as men and, therefore, objects of the women's attention. The possibility that such *craziness* might merit a release as "unfit" is familiar from all wars: for my generation the most vivid picture is Klinger from *MASH* in pumps, furs and earrings. Such cross dressing also raises a final reality highlighted by this song: some of the COs, particularly the artists, were homosexuals who did *not* in fact want "women and women and women." One of these was author Kermit Sheets.⁶⁵ And like any setting in which men live only with other men, it is likely there was some degree of homosexual activity simply because of the limited opportunity for heterosexual contact. But the function of this cross-dressing and other camp tools ultimately was to bind the performers and audience together as "other" than the rest of the world, reminding them why they were there and what they could accomplish together.

From here, the play wraps up with the requisite happy ending: a wedding. Yum Yum points out that Nanki Poo will have to remain in CPS and become a "real c o"⁶⁶ and they sing together with the chorus, "For I've gone and married Yum Yum." However, instead of ending here, Sheets

inserted his version of “The Flowers That Bloom in the Spring.” For him, this song is a lament obscured in cheery music (another strong contrast):

The flowers that bloom in the spring, tra la,
Have nothing to do with the case:
We’re stuck the duration in C P S;
We haven’t the right to say no or yes;
We merrily sing to save face,
Oh, we merrily sing to save face.
And that’s what we mean when we say or we sing,
“Oh, *bother* the flowers that bloom in the spring!”
Tra la...⁶⁷

Like *Stalingrad*, the Gilbert and Sullivan satire ends with a sense of how trapped COs feel, as well as their determination to have something like fun in the face of it. This ideal is both pacifist and psychologically healthy, as it produces beauty in the face of struggle while acknowledging the realities of that struggle. That sense of fun was provided by their shared laughter, a kind of Bakhtinian carnival which allowed them to imagine themselves “on top” temporarily by laughing at their superiors and at their own situation. *Merrily singing* represented real power for these pacifists. First, the singing, the performance, the comedy, could not be taken from them. These public performances empowered their spirit of resistance and reminded them of their potential to change the world together. In addition, in itself this comic style of performance demonstrated that there was a life-giving alternative to the death and destruction on every hand. This was not just gallows humor; the comic spirit was at the heart of what these men believed could and should be different about the world. Their individual catharsis was a group experience, one with implications for everyday life.

Bill Webb, a former Cascade Locks CO and one of the actors in *Stalingrad*, had left CPS by the time *Mikado* was produced but read the script after it was published in 1945. He wrote to Sheets,

I think that this is probably one of the best bits of anti-CPS propoganda [sic] that I have yet seen, the word propoganda being used in its most worthy sense. With all the truth and zeal that we see often enough in statements and the like of men who have said to hell with CPS, few could ever have the effectiveness of such as your little satire.⁶⁸

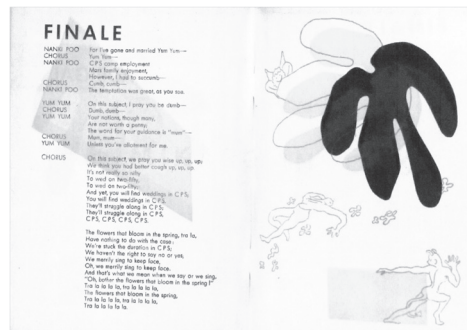


Figure Seven: *Mikado* in CPS Finale. Kermit Sheets Collection Box 5, Folder 4

Webb's letter highlights the political message of the piece, while Sheets' letter, quoted above, emphasizes the fun. Both elements worked together to ensure *Mikado*'s success as satirical theatre, and both are fused in Bakhtin's carnival laughter which "destroys any hierarchical... distance....making an object come up close."⁶⁹ When seen *up close*, the reality of life in CPS could only bring "loud wild cock-eyed laughter."⁷⁰

Conclusion: Looking to the Future

These two satires offer helpful insights into the character and situation of the men of CPS Camp 21 at Cascade Locks, Oregon. While different from each other in any number of ways (geography, religion, vocation), these men were honest in their pacifist convictions, a fact which was visible even to visitors who did not agree with them. They wanted to do something bigger than themselves, but they were stuck in an out-of-the-way place with little to no voice. On one level, they wanted the same things other Americans wanted during World War II: a quick end to the conflict, a return of their fellow Americans, and a better life for the communities destroyed, literally and figuratively, by the conflict. Unlike the majority of Americans, however, these pacifists wanted an end to all conflict, from both sides, and the opportunity to put themselves at risk in the service of rebuilding and reconstruction. They were concerned with local, day-to-day issues like their supervision and their meals, but also with long-term issues of what we today would call "sustainability" in terms of both natural and human resources.

In service of their desire to keep going, camp, carnival, performance, satire and parody were effective tools. Camp, or specifically cross-dressing, probably helped most in reminding COs what they shared: they were all men, most of them missing women, and reliant on one another for everything, including entertainment. Like homosexuals in a straight society, these pacifists did not fit, and their presence in a CPS camp was a constant reminder of that fact. Camp performance reminded them that these roles were socially constructed and, therefore, temporary and changeable. Moments of carnival allowed them to invite others to see them differently, too. Instead of "draft-dodgers," visitors could see them having fun, creating entertainment and making the most of a challenging situation, just like everyone else during wartime.

In these performance experiences, which were extended through publication by the printing group in the camp, the COs found solidarity and connection and release. Like the specified "carnival" times of medieval Europe, which Bakhtin identified in Rabelais and elsewhere, these performances turned the tables on the hierarchy of the camp, just for a little while. But the vision they provided of another world sustained the

COs as they went about their everyday work. Through satire, cross-dressing and other camp performance choices, the performances took those in power and those without and put them together on the same plane. Using “implication, innuendo, and intonation,”⁷¹ they demonstrated a clear understanding of their situation and specific hopes for a new and different future. The audiences at Cascade Locks for these performances were likewise “cleansed by...the comic” in preparation for new things ahead, inspired by art to make new art for a new world.

This catharsis managed to provide the COs with the strength to keep going until the end of CPS, which was not closed down until after all soldiers were returned from foreign battle zones. That strength moved many of them to continue the work they had begun in CPS, both in rebuilding the postwar world and in creating art. Kermit Sheets and many of the other artists went on to artistic careers, working together in San Francisco during its artistic renaissance in the 1950s and beyond. Better known is the work done by CPS veterans from across the country in providing labor and supplies to rebuild communities across the world destroyed by war.⁷² And artistically, these two works offer a model for contemporary community-based theatre.⁷³ Such theatre can be effective without having to be serious. Comic, carnival, and camp tools of exaggeration, suspension of the rules and social inversion can do powerful work in the real lives of people of all kinds, particularly when such performances are grounded in that community’s shared identity, experiences and challenges.

CPS itself was a kind of “carnival” time for the COs: not always positive but definitely removed from the streams of life and history engaged by the majority of the world during those years. At its best, CPS intended to *cleanse* COs by virtue of being removed from general society and prepared to do new things when the time was right, much the way the military experiences of World War II shaped those veterans. While the COs were ideologically opposed to those we often describe as “the greatest generation,” they both shared the desire to better the world through their work, the belief that such betterment was possible, and that group experiences allowed them to imagine a world which was not identical to the one which already existed. These two representative performances provide a picture of the ways in which CPS strove to prepare COs to become their best selves in the service of others. This stepping away, led by the tools of camp to undercut authority and laugh at all kinds of extreme behavior, provides an apt picture of what CPS aspired to do across its 12,000 internees. It set them apart and put them together with each other to talk about what they believed, how society should work, and what they were going to do next. These entertainments encouraged them to laugh together at the ridiculousness of their situation and to look together for an alternative future when they could “be tangent again to the world.”⁷⁴

Because they viewed their situation ultimately in comic rather than tragic terms, these COs bonded by what they were against, found hope and something to be *for*. Camp was part of their experience in many senses. They were living in a camp, away from others, with fewer comforts than most at the time. Their performances capitalized on the camp tools of cross-dressing, in-jokes, and embodiment of the other to communicate their situation to others and bond with each other over it. Camp in this sense is a way to imagine and embody realities which have not yet been. Comic catharsis is not about reinforcing the *status quo* and returning to a pre-existing stasis, but about seeing the possibilities opening up in a future that hasn't been written yet. Sheets' poem, particularly imagined as a solo performance, can be read as a metaphor for the pacifist in the face of a popular world war. Looking into the abyss of conflict and chaos, what can one crazy pacifist performer on a cliff in Oregon actually do? The answer: be the best crazy pacifist performer you can be, because that is today's task. Performance requires group effort, and that shared crazy laughter (accompanied by Prokofiev) can create hope for the future in and with others.

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Abbreviations

LC Spec Coll Lewis and Clark College, Aubrey Watzek Library Archives and Special Collections, Portland, Oregon.

LC Sheets The Kermit Sheets Collections, OLPb006SHE, *LC Spec Coll*.

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Endnotes

- 1 This paper was developed as part of the "Power and Performance: War on Stage" Working Session at the November 2010 Annual Conference of the American Society for Theatre Research (ASTR) in Seattle, Washington. Special thanks to participants in the ASTR working session for valuable feedback, and to the staff of the Archives and Special Collections at Lewis and Clark College's Aubrey Watzek Library in Portland, Oregon—Paul Merchant, Doug Erickson, and Jeremy Skinner—for research assistance and illustrations.
- 2 Kermit Sheets, "Katharsis at Wyeth," *The Illiterati* 2 (Summer 1943) *LC Spec Coll*.
- 3 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1984), 11.
- 4 Dennis Denisoff, "Camp, Aestheticism, and Cultural Inclusiveness in Isherwood's *Berlin Stories*," in *Performing Gender and Comedy: Theories, Texts, and Contexts*, ed. Shannon Hengen (Amsterdam: OPA, 1998), 83.
- 5 CPS, which operated from late 1941 until well after World War II ended, was the brainchild of a coalition of "peace churches" led by the Quakers, Mennonites, and Brethren, who had pushed President Roosevelt to provide more options for American pacifists in the Selective Service Act of 1940 than had been available during World War I. The churches provided the funding, technical agencies (such as the Forest Service or National Park Service) provided work supervision, the US government donated facilities (mainly former CCC camps), and Selective Service oversaw the program. The roughly twelve thousand participants, who came from all kinds of religious backgrounds, initially believed they would work for up to one year, but with the entrance of the United States into the war following Pearl Harbor, terms for most were extended to the end of the war, and then to six months beyond the return of US soldiers. CPS was just one option for drafted pacifists; some chose alternative service in the military, while others chose to go to prison in protest of the draft. COs in CPS regularly made one or the other of these choices, and left CPS either to work with the military or to "walk out" and wait to be arrested; some were, some weren't. And some COs even chose, as the war dragged on and Hitler's atrocities became more clearly known, to join the military and fight. The option of choosing alternative military service is a significant element in *Mikado*. For an excellent overview of CPS' purpose, see chapter two, "Origins of CPS," in Jeffrey Kovac, *Refusing War, Affirming Peace: A History of Civilian Public Service Camp No. 21 at Cascade Locks*, (Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University Press, 2009), 23-30.

- 6 Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 10.
- 7 Kermit Sheets, "Katharsis at Wyeth," *The Illiterati* 2 (Summer 1943) *LC Spec Coll*. I like to imagine, given the references to *Lieutenant Kijé* in *Stalingrad Stalemate*, that Sheets was whistling Prokofiev's "Troika" from that film, best known as a Christmas tune.
- 8 Shannon Hengen, "Foreword," in *Performing Gender and Comedy: Theories, Texts and Contexts*, ed. Shannon Hengen, (Canada: Gordon and Breach, 1998), xi.
- 9 Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), 21.
- 10 See Figures 1 and 2 for images of cross-dressing and drag performance in the camp.
- 11 Wayne R. Dynes, "Camp," *Encyclopedia of Homosexuality*, ed. Wayne R. Dynes (New York: Garland, 1990), 190.
- 12 Denisoff 83.
- 13 Dynes 190.
- 14 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. R. W. Rotsel (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1973), 93-97.
- 15 Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theatre* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 14-15.
- 16 Dolan, 15.
- 17 For samples of the Oregon COs' postwar activities, see chapter 12 and Coda in Steve McQuiddy, *Here on the Edge* (Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University Press, 2013), 227-254.
- 18 Harry Prochaska and Kermit Sheets, *Stalingrad Stalemate* (Wyeth, OR: The Illiterati, 1943), The Kermit Sheets Collections, OLPb006SHE, Lewis and Clark College, Aubrey Watzek Library Archives and Special Collections, Portland, Oregon (hereafter *LC Sheets*), Box 5, Folder 3. See Figure Three for the Cover Page, and Figures Four and Five for production images.
- 19 Prochaska, *Stalingrad* 3. Of course, in October, the Soviets and Germans were just a couple of months into the five month conflict.
- 20 Harry Prochaska, "Introduction to Acirema Stories," *LC Sheets*, Box 6, Folder 14.
- 21 Bakhtin, *Problems*, 96.
- 22 Prochaska, *Stalingrad* 8.
- 23 The scripts which survive in the Sheets Collection at Lewis and Clark College were both printed after their performances in order to be read by COs across CPS, rather than in advance as rehearsal scripts. Printing was one of the primary activities of the arts group, and provides its most material legacy.
- 24 Prochaska, *Stalingrad* 7.
- 25 Prochaska, *Stalingrad* 9.
- 26 Prochaska, *Stalingrad* 9.
- 27 Prochaska, *Stalingrad* 10.
- 28 Prochaska, *Stalingrad* 11.
- 29 Prochaska, *Stalingrad* 11.
- 30 Prochaska, *Stalingrad* 12.
- 31 Prochaska, *Stalingrad* 12.
- 32 Bakhtin, *Problems* 97.
- 33 Prochaska, *Stalingrad* 15.
- 34 Prochaska, *Stalingrad* 16.
- 35 Prochaska, *Stalingrad* 6.
- 36 Sheets, Letter.
- 37 Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* 53.
- 38 Kermit Sheets, Letter to undisclosed recipients, n.d., probably October 21, 1942, *LC Sheets*.
- 39 Kermit Sheets, Interview with Katrine Barber, March 2005, Collection of Professor Barber.
- 40 Acirema is "America" spelled backwards.
- 41 Prochaska, "Introduction."
- 42 Prochaska, "Introduction."
- 43 Kovac 123.
- 44 Kermit Sheets, *The Mikado in CPS* (Waldport, OR: The Illiterati, 1945), *LC Sheets*, Box 5, Folder 4. See Figure Six for a photo of Sheets dancing with fellow CO Kemper Nomland

- and local sympathizer Manche Langley in a scene that suggests the “Three Little Maids” dance, and Figure Seven for a reproduction of the final page of the printed script.
- 45 Adrian Wilson and Joyce Lancaster Wilson, *Two Against the Tide: A Conscientious Objector in World War II* (Austin, TX: W. Thomas Taylor, 1990), 84.
- 46 Sheets, *Mikado* 2.
- 47 Sheets, *Mikado* 4.
- 48 Sheets, *Mikado* 6.
- 49 Sheets, *Mikado* 8.
- 50 Sheets, *Mikado* 10.
- 51 Sheets, *Mikado* 10.
- 52 Sheets, *Mikado* 10.
- 53 Clayton James, Interview, in *Camp 56: An Oral History Project: World War II Conscientious Objectors & the Waldport, Oregon Civilian Public Service Camp*, ed. Katrine Barber, Jo Ogden, and Eliza Jones (Portland, OR: Siuslaw National Forest and Portland State University, 2003), 101. PDF File. <www.ccrh.org/oral/co.pdf>
- 54 Ernest Barr, Interview, in Barber et al, 15.
- 55 See Figure Six, which shows Kermit Sheets, Kemper Nomland, and Manche Langley performing a dance which might suggest at least the style of this song’s performance, dated from Waldport in 1944. And the revival of *Mikado* at Waldport was described as having been performed by just three actors, who might have performed much like this throughout the show.
- 56 Sheets, *Mikado* 12.
- 57 Sheets, *Mikado* 14.
- 58 “Special Entry,” *The Columbian* 1.11 (June 20, 1942), n.p., *LC Sheets*, Box 4, Folder 1.
- 59 “Special Entry.”
- 60 “Special Entry.”
- 61 Sheets, *Mikado* 15.
- 62 Sheets, *Mikado* 18.
- 63 Sheets, *Mikado* 21.
- 64 Sheets, *Mikado* 22.
- 65 Sheets, Interview.
- 66 Sheets, *Mikado* 22.
- 67 Sheets, *Mikado* 23.
- 68 Bill Webb, Letter to Kermit Sheets, April 21, 1945, *LC Sheets*, Box 6, Folder 9.
- 69 Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* 21.
- 70 Sheets, “Katharsis at Wyeth.”
- 71 Dynes 189.
- 72 See McQuiddy, Coda.
- 73 For the concept of “community-building theatre,” based on another CPS performance, see Andrew Ryder, “‘Here on the Edge’: Community-Building Theatre During World War II,” *Platform ejournal of Theatre and Performing Arts* 5.2 (2011): online. www.rhul.ac.uk/dramaandtheatre/platform/issues/vol5-no2-communitiesandperformance-spring2011.aspx.
- 74 William Everson, *Untide* 1.10 (March 13, 1943).

Commodification and Exploitation of the Brazilian Bombshell Carmen Miranda

RACHEL E. FORAN

Within the identity and personification of Carmen Miranda lies layers of cross cultural influence and appropriation of Bahian women clothing style and Afro-Brazilian sounds of samba. Her career flourished in the early 1940s due to the Good Neighbor policy—a strategy that was meant to “restore employment, consumption, and prosperity in the domestic market by expanding exports to Latin America and other regions of the world.”¹ The issue of identity for Carmen Miranda is complicated, because she comes from an entirely Portuguese family, yet she grew up in Rio’s bohemian district called “Lapa.” Due to her close proximity to an Afro-Brazilian population, she was heavily influenced by Afro Brazilian culture—musically and in costume traditions. Her quick rise to fame took her to the United States, where some critics argue she was *Americanized*. Her cultural image is further complicated, when it was used by The United Fruit Company in 1944 for the Miss Chiquita Banana advertising logo character. Carmen Miranda’s image became a generic symbol for the exotic sexualized Latina representing all of Latin America through American musical cinema. Known to American audiences as “The Brazilian Bombshell,” she was a South American export made possible by the Good Neighbor policy; she has been considered to be the chief export of Brazil, second to her was coffee.² With her grand gestures, exaggerated baiana costume and successful performance of samba, Carmen not only developed her own performance style but became an iconic symbol that commodified Afro-Brazilian culture as the exotic product ripe for American consumption.

Miranda’s rise to fame in the United States was swift and heavily aided by the American need for escape and entertainment after the financial devastation of the Depression of the 1930s and the new world war raging

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in Europe and the Pacific in the early 1940s. Her vocal range was limited, but it was her sense of rhythm and her outgoing playfulness that filled her performance and which audiences found irresistible.³ Before she became an American musical film icon, she was a common household name in Brazil by way of the radio. She was known as the “Queen of Samba.”⁴ Brazil’s President Vargas embraced Carmen Miranda as she suited his vision of a new national identity, because she dressed in the clothes that was widely recognized as a national/cultural symbol—the clothes of the *baiana*, referencing the African women who carried fruits to the market.⁵ It was precisely this iconic and memorable image that Miranda used to her advantage, and Hollywood filmmakers exploited. Robert Stam condemns the “Hollywoodized” version of Latin America personified through the extravagantly costumed and highly stylized performance of Miranda as a sort of reduction and simplification of a rich culture when he states, “The black contribution to Brazilian culture was reduced to the picturesque and the folkloric, more a matter of dance and cuisine than of fundamental political or economic achievements.”⁶

Miranda’s performance and film persona was highly sexualized, flamboyant and described as “barbaric” and “brilliant” by some reviewers.⁷ Her hands and gestures were continually expressive; she swayed her hips, displayed exaggerated facial expressions and always dressed in colorfully vibrant costumes with over the top headdresses. Her music and fashion style was an amalgamation of Afro-Brazilian influence. To Brazilians, the samba was considered Negro music, so it was surprising to Miranda’s Brazilian fan base that she was so immediately successful on the Broadway stage in America in the late 1930s to early 1940s.⁸ According to Robert Stam, the “samba took a number of forms, from the grittier favela⁹ versions themselves to the more ‘sophisticated’ orchestrations of singers like Carmen Miranda.”¹⁰ Even though Miranda was raised in a bohemian neighborhood of Rio and her parents were working class, there is still a marker of class separation due to racial difference. Carmen was not of African descent; she was Portuguese, and therefore considered “white.”

Carmen Miranda’s costume is based on the clothing of a *baiana*: an Afro-Brazilian woman from the northeastern state of Bahia who wear the traditional dress of a hooped skirt, lace blouse, turban, necklaces and amulets. These women are commonly street vendors who sell food of African origin.¹¹ Traditionally, they sell “ritual African foods like *acarajé*: bean fritters with shrimp fried in palm oil.”¹² Her outfit, known as her “tutti-frutti” costume (See Image 1), was a highly stylized version of the *baiana*. Carmen Miranda’s body and entire persona was exaggerated, sexualized and made to be a tropical exotic. Carmen was almost always shown with a bare midriff twisting her torso while she danced; her outfits were always extremely colorful and glamorous, making her stand out amongst a crowd

of chorus girls. The characters she played (such as Dorita in *The Gang's All Here*) were two dimensional, emotionally/mentally uncomplicated and were over-the-top. Due to the perception of Carmen Miranda's skin color as essentially "white," the American public did not view her lyrics, costume, or music as African in origin. Therefore, she became known as the "Brazilian Bombshell" and was the object of America's instant fascination and obsession with her image and charismatic personality. This exotic, sexy, wild and yet safe image of Miranda allowed African culture to be easily assimilated into American white culture.



Image 1: *The Gang's All Here* (1943).

To compare the historical and cultural significance of Miranda's costume inspiration, the image of the Brazilian National doll, circa 1959, can serve as an example to how this figure served as an emblem for the country, and how that likeness was altered and exaggerated into a Hollywood glamorization to create heightened exoticism and wild sexuality. The doll is reversible and is meant to represent Brazilian women in two forms. Both images of Brazilian women became a part of pop culture in the 1930s and 1940s. Version one (See Image 2) of the National doll is costumed in a white lace blouse and a turban that was a typical representation of an Afro-Brazilian (baiana) woman. "The lacy white garments and colorful beads she wore are associated with adepts of the candomblé religion, a mix of African, Catholic and some Native American beliefs and traditions."¹³ This first version of the doll has a basket of fruit on her head which contains a pineapple, bananas and a few other types of fruit; the material is felt. The Museum Victoria provides further details of its manner of construction and image:

Felt has been sewn on for the eyes and mouth and further stitches have been used to delineate the eye-brows and lashes. Her jewelry consists of gold loop earrings with matching bracelets on either wrist. Around her neck she wears two beaded necklaces. Her top is made of an open weave lace type material which comes to where her navel would be. Over her shoulder she has a yellow and orange sash. Her skirt olive green with red trimming. It is quite puffy and has a ruffle at the bottom which has felt flowers at regular intervals around the top of it.¹⁴

These dolls were meant to be sold as souvenirs of particular countries; however, they were often inaccurate representations of that country or region. The costume is stylized and simplified in order to become



Image 2: Version one and version two of Brazilian National doll, 1959.

a generic representation that could be easily recognizable to tourists. This is not dissimilar to Miranda's costume. Her fashion style became an emblem of all Latin America, not just Brazil. Her vibrant costume drew directly upon the traditional fabrics and designs of the Fon and the Yoruba brought to Brazil. As Robert Stam explains, "Black women in Bahia, some of them slaves, were long famous for their gala dresses and sumptuous jewelry."¹⁵ Overtime the American obsession with Miranda's glamorous persona and the popularity of her particular baiana-inspired style caused an "increasingly disassociation from the blackness of Bahia."¹⁶ By 1950, the origin of her turban had been "rewritten as simply Latin."¹⁷

In American film, Carmen Miranda filled the role of female Other—she served as a physical embodiment for the promise and fulfillment of a national and sexual conquest.¹⁸ In her book *Dance and the Hollywood Latina*, Priscilla Peña Ovalle asserts that Carmen Miranda in the role of the Hollywood Latina, "is an alluring and amalgamated symbol of the colonial relationship between Latin America and the United States."¹⁹ She was the "musical siren" that was meant to appeal to the male sexual appetite—she was wild, untamed, and had a natural ability to dance seductively. She was a product of consumption; the patriarchal white male gaze saw her and billed her as an exotic commodity—idealized and willing for consumption of its audience and consumer base. Miranda's success as one of the highest paid actresses in the United States in the early 1940s came at a great price; Ovalle addresses the difficult paradox surrounding Carmen Miranda and other Hollywood Latinas.

Although dance often restricts the Hollywood Latina in stereotypical roles that fit commercial expectations, this appeal to wider audiences can often result in greater box office, public recognition, and star power. As her dance produces access and agency, it paradoxically perpetuates the myth that Latinas are inherently passionate, promiscuous, and temporary.²⁰

Miranda was a temporary box office draw; her image did not allow for variety. In the time span of Hollywood, she was a one-night-stand. Miranda was continually cast in the role of the exotic night club performer, and since she was from Brazil she was considered "South American savage." In the film *The Gang's All Here* (1943), this is precisely how she is described

by an older white patron of the New Yorker night club. The female lead in the film was the fashionably blonde Alice Faye. In the film Miranda serves as the female Other in relation to the role of Alice Faye's "Miss Allen"—the love interest in the film. Despite Miranda's billing as one of the stars of the film, her character is a sort of side note, musical interlude and comic relief. The core of the plot line revolves around Miss Allen and Sgt. Andy Mason (played by James Ellison); their love story is the driving action and source of complication throughout the film. Miranda serves as a means to introduce one of the primary sets for the film, the musical tone, and highlights the social/class/cultural difference between the United States—or more specifically, the white elite class—and South America.

In terms of the choices of cinematic framing, Miranda was rarely framed in a close-up, a filming technique that was common for leading actresses such as Alice Faye. Most camera shots for Miranda comprised of a wider lens, largely due to the size of her outlandish turbans, but also because she is almost constantly moving to the rhythm of the music. A good portion of scenes in the film featuring Carmen are musical numbers that have no relation to the dialogue or story line of the film—it is not an integrated musical. Later in the film, Miranda's role is more of a background character who inserts a random comedic one-liner, and who stirs some trouble between an upper-class older couple in a scene where the older husband ultimately cannot control himself when around Dorita (Miranda). While in Brazil Carmen Miranda was considered white due to her Portuguese heritage; in America she was associated with blackness based on the perception of uncontrolled sexual passion. However, this blackness was not perceived as threatening to the *status quo*, and it was ultimately disseminated into a generic Latiness.

Miranda's financial and popular success came at a large price; by establishing such a strong and recognizable persona, Miranda was never able to expand her acting roles beyond the limited range of the "exotic night club performer." Her success in Hollywood divided her from her Brazilian fan base. They accused her of being "Americanized" and no longer representing Brazilian culture or music—in essence, they believed she forgot her roots. Miranda also came under constant scrutiny with the Production Code Administration (PCA), regarding her costume and her expressive performance style. Due to her identity as "exotic" and the female Other, the PCA regulated her performance to make sure that it was keeping with their standards of acceptable conduct and bodily image. She was constantly re-examined in order to ensure that the American public was not exposed to indecent movements within her dancing.²¹

A further consequence regarding Miranda's lasting impact in American culture is another troubling level of consumer commodification—Carmen Miranda's image was used as the inspiration for the United Fruit

Company's new animated advertising ploy, Miss Chiquita Banana. (See Image 3 in Appendix) The company explains that Miss Chiquita's origins in 1944 started with artist Dik Browne and live model Patty Clayton. This debut of Miss Chiquita just so happened to be at the height of Miranda's popularity in the United States. The inspiration is quite obvious. Miss Chiquita is wearing a colorful outfit similar to those made popular by Carmen Miranda, and she even wears a large hat filled with various fruits. Miss Chiquita is a hybrid; she is half human—we can see her feminine and idealized legs. But, her upper body takes the shape of a feminized banana wearing a fiery dress and large headdress. Alberto Sandoval-Sanchez describes Miss Chiquita as a "hybrid monster, a half-breed whose performance became an Anglo-American cultural icon."²² Miss Chiquita has appeared in various animated commercials; within each of them are a catching jingle meant to parody Carmen Miranda and to educate the American consumer on the nutritional benefits of bananas. The United Fruit Company saw a prime opportunity to capitalize on a familiar feminine image established by the export and celebration of bananas through Carmen Miranda. The company realized the potential of the stereotype of the "Latin foreign other" that had already been firmly instilled in the American cultural imagination.²³

The Good Neighbor policy was meant to encourage economic trade relations between the United States and Latin America during World War II. The chief ambassador of this good-will policy was the lovely and vivacious Carmen Miranda. Coined "The Brazilian Bombshell," Carmen Miranda was fetishized and commodified for American consumption, a marketing ploy particularly aimed for the white male gaze. Despite her costumes being relatively modest in the limited display of her body, the revealing of her midriff and the hint of her navel were the locus for fetishizing her identity into a "barbaric" yet "brilliant" cultural icon of Latin America. While she was condemned by critics in Brazil as becoming "Americanized" by the Hollywood machine, Carmen never found opportunities to expand her career beyond the "foreign exotic" stereotype imported to America for the sole purpose of entertainment and ready consumption.

Appendix

The doll's costume with the white lace blouse and turban is a typical representation of an Afro-Brazilian Bahiana (Baiana) woman who could often be found selling food on the street. The lacy white garments and colorful beads she wore are associated with adepts of the candomblé religion, a mix of African, Catholic and some Native American beliefs and traditions.

This same representation of the Bahiana woman is the inspiration for the costume worn by the other doll. Within Brazil the image of the Bahiana became part of popular culture and Brazilian identity through its use as a

carnival costume during the 1920s and 1930s. It was further popularized and promoted as a symbol of Brazilian identity, both in Brazil and internationally, by Brazilian entertainer Carmen Miranda. Miranda's costumes with their frills, bare shoulders and/or midriff's, and the turban laden fruit, were simply an exaggerated stylization of the Bahiana woman. Internationally these costumes became a symbol of Brazilian and to an extent Latin America culture and identity during the 1940s and 1950s.

These dolls were purchased as souvenirs of particular countries and like many mass produced souvenirs they are often not accurate representations of a particular country or region, and may actually better reflect neighboring counties or regions. This occurs because costumes are often stylized and simplified resulting dolls wearing generic costume elements which are common to many countries/regions. Often the fabrics and decorations used are selected to make the dolls cheap and easy to manufacture and aesthetically pleasing. This can result in the fabrics, colours and decorations of the doll's clothing having little or no reflection of the costume associated with a particular country or region they are meant to be representative of.

Description: Reversible doll with two female characters. The first has a basket of fruit on her head which contains a felt pineapple and felt bananas as well as some other types of fruit. Felt has been sewn on for the eyes and mouth and further stitches have been used to delineate the eye-brows and lashes. Her jewelry consists of gold loop earrings with matching bracelets on either wrist. Around her neck she wears two beaded necklaces. Her top is made of an open weave lace type material which comes to where her navel would be. Over her shoulder she has a yellow and orange sash. Her skirt is olive green with red trimming. It is quite puffy and has a ruffle at the bottom which has felt flowers at regular intervals around the top of it. The reverse doll, which appears when the skirt of the first doll is lifted over her head, has her hair tied up and covered with a cream scarf. Her face is made in a similar fashion to the first doll. Her jewelry too is similar, however, she has only one bracelet and one necklace. Her top is cream and her skirt is red and patterned. She has a red, blue and white scarf over her shoulder.



Image 3: Miss Chiquita Banana

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Endnotes

- 1 Tompkins 194.
- 2 Stated by Eduardo Galeano. Sandoval-Sánchez 25.
- 3 Tompkins 193.
- 4 Tompkins 193.
- 5 Tompkins 194.
- 6 Stam 80.
- 7 Ovalle 52.
- 8 Miranda, Carmen, Helena Solberg, David Meyer, Cynthia Adler, Erick Barreto, and Leticia Monte. *Carmen Miranda: Bananas Is My Business*. New York: Fox Lorber Home Video, 1998.
- 9 Favela: a settlement of jerry-built shacks lying on the outskirts of a Brazilian city. www.merriam-webster.com
- 10 Stam 81.
- 11 Shaw 186.
- 12 Stam 85.
- 13 museumvictoria.com.au/collections/items/251488/national-doll-brazilian-1959
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- 15 Stam 85.
- 16 Ovalle 62.
- 17 Ovalle 62.
- 18 Ovalle 1.
- 19 Ovalle 5.
- 20 Ovalle 6.
- 21 Ovalle 53.
- 22 Sandoval-Sanchez 29.
- 23 Sandoval-Sanchez 29.

Binary Opposition in *The Comedy of Errors*

An Actor's Analysis of Shakespeare's First Play

GARY GILLESPIE

As members of the species called the “story telling animal,” we long to enhance our sense of self and society through hearing tales that provide templates for thinking about our place in the universe. Shakespeare’s ability to tackle profound psychological and existential questions that haunt humanity has long made him a celebrated literary prophet. Performed for centuries, his cannon of tragic and comic plays are as popular as ever.

Over the years I have seen most of Shakespeare’s commonly produced plays—some plays multiple times. So it was a delight when I had a chance to act in a production at our university. The experience of moving from fan to actor provided new insights into the brilliance of the literature. A record of these musings may help others appreciate the power of story to reshape human identity.

Isaac Asimov calls *The Comedy of Errors*, considered Shakespeare’s first play, a “total farce.” The play tells the story of one day in the life of a separated family of twins who happen to arrive at the same city unaware.¹ Audiences laugh at the characters’ implausible mishaps and mistaken identities and are warmed by the happy ending when the family is re-united. Surprisingly we are not only entertained but also aesthetically elevated. We leave the playhouse with a renewed faith in the possibility of reconciliation. We are moved beyond what we would expect from witnessing a series of jokes by laughable characters.

Because the play, perhaps more than others, ideally models the structure of drama, it is worth a closer look. By pairing contrasting images in sequences, Shakespeare orchestrates a story of salvation, culturally familiar to original

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audiences but neglected by us today. Applying methods for rhetorical analysis to the play reveals more depth than might be expected of a farce.

Uncovering what is beneath the surface is best achieved by focusing on the character of Egeon, father of the twins, who appears in Act One to present his apology and explain how the family was separated, then again in Act Five in a final defense while awaiting execution.

The lines for the “hapless Egeon” are tragic and his tone serious. His pleas are juxtaposed with the silly jokes and slapstick banter of the other characters. We could explain his melancholy as foil to amplify the overall hilarity. Or we could see him as the scapegoat of the story, a Christ figure, who fulfills the mythical aspirations of the viewers so the conflicts and confusions of the human condition might find happy resolution.

In what follows, let me call attention to key contrasts that amplify the hilarity of the plot and set up the pleasing denouement in the final act. First, I will sum up the comic devices used in the play; second, reveal the structure of binary oppositions that make up the conflict; and, finally examine key metaphors, devices and props that are imbued with theological meaning.

There are two theories that explain humor, incongruity and superiority. First, when a person recognizes that two states are out of sync or contradict one another, he or she experiences the pleasure or delight of knowing. This “now I get it” or appreciation of the joke, permits the conscious mind to rise above the irony and gain what Kenneth Burke calls, a perspective by incongruity.²

The enjoyment of the incongruous humor—signaled by an outward laugh or inner delight—bridges the kind of mental gaps that the mind faces daily in trying to grasp recognizable patterns in the chaos of the world. Humor makes the world feel connected. The knack for amusement in all things, not taking the absurdities of life too seriously, to laugh and enjoy even in the face of hardship, is a life skill aided by playwrights like Shakespeare who understood our need to experience the gestalt of psychological wholeness.

Irony is the comic device in which the recipient is meant to believe the opposite of what is said. Throughout the play the audiences see what the characters miss. The characters say one thing, but we know that the opposite is true. Adrianna calls Antipholus of Syracuse “husband,” when we know that she is speaking to her husband’s twin who has just arrived in town.

The second way to explain humor is showing superiority over a victim. Much slapstick humor is funny, because we tend to laugh at the plight of characters who suffer indignities or unlikely hardships. Usually the victim’s plight is exaggerated to the point of absurdity. The Three Stooges, a popular 1940’s film series about three goofy friends who constantly get into trouble, illustrates this second device. Unlike our normal reaction of

seeing a person physically hurt, the context of the farce causes amusement. When Mo pokes Larry in the eyes with his fingers, we laugh. We enjoy our position of superiority over the poor sap made the brunt of the joke.

The amusement of feeling superior is the basis for jokes that make fun of other people in other groups from our own and the basis for sexist or racist humor. We may make fun of people who live in another city or who have a different occupation, language or social standing. The comic television series *Portlandia* constantly makes fun of people who live in Portland, showing the viewer's superiority of living in their home city that isn't *crazy*. In the same way, we may make fun of people or classes who have power over us. Our superiors, professor or the ruling political party may have power over us, but we compensate by laughing at them.

Another factor of humor is exaggeration. Jokes may be overstatements—something is said that is far more than it actually is—and understatement—something is said to be far less than it actually is. Because we know that the reality differs from what is stated, exaggeration feeds our sense of irony.

In *The Comedy of Errors* Shakespeare utilizes all comic devices, especially exaggeration. In Act One Egeon is brought before the Duke of Ephesus, charged with the crime of trespassing. We learn Ephesian law forbids any citizen of Syracuse from setting foot in their town. Egeon, a citizen of Syracuse, is on a journey searching for his lost twin sons. The punishment is a large fine or death. Although formally wealthy, Egeon has spent all of his money on his quest, and because he has no friends in town to pay the fine he faces execution at sundown. He seems resigned to die, preferring death to his unresolved hardships.

The Duke is curious what those hardships might be and asks for a defense for why he came to the forbidden town. Egeon then goes into a long monologue providing the audience with the backstory. He explains how he became separated from his wife and one of his twin sons in a shipwreck. It turns out that each twin son was paired with a servant who also had a twin brother. We could find humor in his unlikely hardships, but the tone of the text doesn't seem funny. The tone and length of the monolog is problematic for the actor who must win the attention of the audience. An exaggerated delivery with vocal variety and sensory showing is key.

Perhaps the original audience would find humor in an old man telling an unlikely story of heroically surviving a shipwreck. Exaggerated travel tales would be common entertainment in pubs in the 16th Century. A modern comic parallel could be how we might laugh at an old man saying "young people have it easy today. In my day we had to walk five miles to school barefoot in the snow..." Our own identity is enhanced in contrast to the person being laughed at.

More generally, humor is pleasing, because discordant neural synapses are connected by a joke. It is mental stimulation. The opposite is boredom. The elevating mental connections that occur in irony are similar to the engagement of dramatic storytelling.

In his study of cultural myths, anthropologist Levi Strauss discovered the basic structure of binary opposition between opposing forces and people in any good story. He theorized that in order to make sense of the world human beings notice what is familiar and contrast accepted, comfortable assumptions with what is foreign and abnormal. Binary opposition forms the basis for cultural values. We know what is bad by contrasting it with what is good. Stories follow a structure in which conflict between two forces is resolved, thus providing the needed mental glue to bind together what would otherwise be inscrutable.³

The Comedy of Errors has binary opposition between all levels possible in dramatic conflict. There is struggle between social class, social order, societies, nature and supernatural forces, between family members, siblings, between agents of commerce, slave-master, husband-wife, male-female romance, and sacred order versus the profane order. By the end of the play all of these factors of disorder are resolved.

In Acts Two to Four we find other contrasting images that form the basis for dramatic interest as well as humor.

Antipholus of Syracuse vs Antipholus of Ephesus.

Dromio of Syracuse vs Dromio of Ephesus.

Merchant demanding payment vs unwilling customer

Antipholus of Ephesus vs his wife Adrianna (who each suppose the other is unfaithful.)

Adrianna vs both Dromios.

Antipholus of Ephesus vs both Dromios.

Servants inside the locked house vs Dromio of Ephesus outside

Sacrilege of magic vs sacredness of holiness.

Besides dramatic contrasts that demand action to achieve a sense of resolution, key devices, metaphors and props in the play also reveal a binary structure. The subject of a play about two sets of twins is itself binary. Identical twins are two distinct persons who appear exactly alike. The presence of twins invites us to consider what makes up personal identity. When we can't tell the difference between the two, we laugh at the limitations of our perception. How do we know what is authentic reality, when we can't trust even our eyes?

Shakespeare's choice in naming the sons is a binary pun. "Antipholus" means "opposed in balance". The Greek word alludes to equal weights set on a scale.⁴

One of the most common questions for dramaturges and audiences of the *Comedy* alike is why the twins—as well as the twin servants—share the same name? A line by Ageon states that as babies the twins were indistinguishable "but by names" implies that the names should differ. But, throughout the dialogue both brothers are called Antipholus and both servants are called Dromio.

Some suggest that most of the jokes in the farce would be impossible if the brothers had different names, so that we must suspend disbelief and suppress our desire for a reason. It could be that the brothers were known by a common last name, such as "Jones here did this..." Perhaps an internal rationale for the shared names came about from the confusion of the shipwreck. If the babies were identical, how would the parents know the difference, especially in a crisis? When Amelia bound one son with his servant pair to one end of the mast—and Egeon did the same—each parent could have thought that they cared for the same twin. Egeon seems to have figured that because his wife favored "the latter born" that she chose to bind herself to him. But, what if Amelia chose the other twin (we don't know his name), and Egeon had custody of the twin named Antipholus? After the separation, the babies grew up using the same name. That could explain why the two leading characters are called by the same name.

A shipwreck mix up might also explain why the twin servants are both called Dromio, except Egeon tells us specifically that the servant of the Antipholus in his care was "reft of his brother, yet retained his name." Why the twin servants had the same name is left unanswered in the text. It could be that either the twin servants were called by their common last name or given the same first name as a joke or for some other reason. There are modern examples of parents who chose to name identical twins by the same name. In one example the parents named the sons after the father and gave each a different middle name.⁵

All identical twins share hilarious stories of being mixed up with their sibling. Twins who share the same name report that they are constantly mistaken for the other and usually assume middle or nick names. Two people who look alike with the same name is humorous because it violates our expectations of reality. We expect that brothers, especially twins, will have different names. Encountering twin brothers who share the same name jolts our comfortable ways of thinking in produces a mental binary opposition.

The main question behind the conflict, what dramaturges call the "point of attack of the major dramatic question," centers on reconciling identity in

a confused and displaced world. This central question is expressed directly by Antipholus of Syracuse who says:

To me she speaks; she moves me for her theme. What, was I married to her in my dream? Or sleep I now and think I hear all this? What error drives our eyes and ears amiss? Until I know this sure uncertainty I'll entertain the offered fallacy.

Then again in Act 2, Scene 2:

Am I in earth in heaven or in hell? Sleeping or waking mad or well-advised? Know unto these and to myself disguised? I'll say as they say, and persevere so, and in this mist at all adventures go.

Later in Act 4, Scene 3, he observes, "The fellow is distract, and so am I, And here we wander in illusion." He isn't sure what is real and what is illusory. We find that all of the characters are perplexed similar self-doubts.

Antipholus of Syracuse finds himself in a city that constantly challenges his identity. His self doubt is another example of conflict in the play. He like Dromio of Syracuse and Egean is experiencing internal conflict.

Moreover, we can identify crucial props used or referred to in the play that illustrate the binary structure between opposing forces and strategies. We find these objects mediate binary conflict experienced by characters. The spare mast that is used as a raft after the shipwreck, and the rescue ships and ship quartered by Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse away from the wicked city are instruments of salvation throughout the play that to take agents to safety. The characters caught in the middle of conflict look for the raft of ship to save them. The mast is a symbol of the cross.

The 1000 marks and gold coins illustrate conflict over economic power. Egeon is charged with paying a fine or face execution. As an impoverished person he is placed in opposition to the rich. When Antipolus of Ephesus dickers with the merchant or when he seeks to obtain bail with a bag of gold coins, we see economic conflict between *the haves and the have-nots*.

The chain that Antipolus commissions and ring that is given as payment to the Courtesan symbolizes familial commitments that are questioned.

The rope used by Antipholus of Ephesus to beat Dromio symbolizes class stratification between master and servant.

Probably the best symbol of the play's main dramatic question is the locked door keeping Antipholus of Ephesus out of his house. It is a physical obstacle to resolution of all conflict in the play and best illustrates the drama's binary structure.

He demands a crow bar—symbolizing the conflict of using physical power—to break down the door; however, he is diverted as the play's conflicts rise.

More than any other character, the concept of binary opposition defines the patriarch of *The Comedy of Errors*. Egeon might seem more of a tragic character than a comic one, except that he lives in a world of highly implausible contrasts. In Act One we find incongruity between the following elements:

The powerful Duke and the hapless Egeon.

The feuding cities of Ephesus and Syracuse.

Egeon pleading for mercy and his resignation to death.

Egeon and his wife separated during the first two thirds of her pregnancy.

Wealthy Egeon's twin sons and the twin sons of a poor woman.

Stormy sea and calm sea.

Half of the mast split into two by the mighty rock and the other half.

His wife picked up by fishermen of Corinth and his own rescue ship headed in an opposite direction.

Egeon and natural and supernatural forces that cause him trouble.

The choice of the name Egeon for the father of the twins is also relevant to the theme of binary opposition. The name is associated with the Aegean Sea. According to Greek myth Aegeus, King of Athens, gave his name to the sea. The sea is a symbol of chaos and suffering. His raft is split by the mighty rock from which the name of the Aegean sea is derived. As a symbol of the fallen world of human suffering, Egeon is father of the twins. Other sources claim that the Aegean derived its name from an island—the mighty rock—that split the mast—looked like a goat and the Greek root for goat is *agea*. The etymology of the word means “of a goat.”⁶

Egeon is, therefore, the play's scapegoat. He faces execution similar to the crucifixion of Christ. He is placed in tragic opposition to the other farcical characters. In Act Five the play's characters gather to witness the execution in what would be an expiatory, sacrificial rite. In *The Rhetoric of Religion* literary theorist Kenneth Burke explains one mode of human motivation as the need to transfer guilt onto a scapegoat who must be destroyed, so that the community might experience the bond of collective redemption. Egeon's plight as a displaced parent searching for lost sons makes him an innocent victim whose death would be all the more pitiful.

We could see the mast, used as a makeshift life raft to save the family from the ravages of the sea storm—as a symbol of the Christian cross. A ship mast topped by a pole (known as the crosstree spreader) looks like a cross. When the mast is broken in half the family is severed and lost. While Aegean is a symbol of the human condition and is tossed about by the chaos of suffering and powerlessness, the Duke is symbol of social order, civilization and divine justice.

More binary dramatic action is revealed in Egeon's view of himself as being in opposition to natural and cosmic forces. He personifies the heavens, the sun, time, fortune as well as the gods as all conspiring against him. The Duke refers to the old man's plight as a result of the fates. "Hapless Egeon, whom the fates have mark'd to bear the extremity of dire mishap!" Act One, Scene One.

Egeon is the victim chosen in the plot to bear the burden of death to uphold the social order. Egeon's plight gives the play's beginning and end symmetry. The drama begins with Egeon's defense before the Duke and it ends with his last plea before the Duke. Egeon sees who he thinks is his lost son and asks permission to speak to him, hoping that his son will pay the fine and save his life. But, when he speaks to Antipholus of Ephesus he is un-recognized and rebuffed. In a climate of rejection the Duke concludes that the old man must be senile.

Egeon's sufferings are varied. He faces execution, is unable to pay his ransom, because he spent all of his money searching for his lost sons, and he is un-recognized by his son who is his last hope of redemption. The ravages of old age that he endures with its afflictions and mental collapses seems oddly paired with the farcical speech of Antipholus of Syracuse in the final act, raging against his comrades for falsely accusing him of madness.

After hearing the accusers and defenders of Antipholus of Syracuse, the Duke concludes that everyone has lost the ability to reason. "I think you all have drunk of Circe's cup." This is an allusion to the drink of an evil goddess in *The Odyssey* that turns men into animals. So, we see the binary pair of the irrationality of animals contrasted with sober reasoning of a human, such as the Duke.⁷

In Act Five we learn that the mother of the twins, Amelia, was separated from her son and servant child soon after being rescued. She assumed the position of Abbess of a convent in Ephesus. The biblical city of Ephesus was said to be a place of sorcery, and Antipholus of Syracuse tells us that he fears the power of witches and spirits present there. Here we find another feature of binary opposition in the plot: the contrast between profane sorcery and the sacred realm represented by the Abbess and her effort to give sanctuary to Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse, who flee to the convent for protection.

The climax of the play occurs after Antipholus denies knowing Egeon three times. His denial might remind the audience of Saint Peter's thrice denial of knowing Christ. From Egeon's perspective he has been betrayed like Christ was by Peter. "Perhaps, my son, Thou shamest to acknowledge me in misery." (Act Five, Scene One) Egeon is left in despair. But, he is soon relieved when both sets of twin brothers appear together on stage and are

recognized. Then to his delight, the Abbess arrives to bring happy news that the entire family has actually been re-united. The Abbess banishes confusion that has caused everyone so much trouble and announces salvation.

Misunderstandings are mended and the Duke, who we learn was the benefactor of Antipholus of Ephesus, is overcome by the reunion and pardons Egeon, who rejoins his wife. Egeon's defense in Act One begins by telling the Duke that he lived in joy with his wife before the separation. Now the play ends with his joyful reunion. Ideally, following the arc of dramatic structure, the play returns us to a new state of equilibrium.

Finally, the Abbess Amelia invites everyone to a reunion feast. In the last lines the two Dromio's share jokes and circle each other as if looking into a mirror. The characters exit in joy. The story ends with a feast, symbolically alluding to the idealized order envisioned by the biblical prophet Isaiah and the writer of the *Book of Revelation* who speak of a divine meal awaiting the righteous in heaven.⁸ The audience is warmed by the archetypal hope that one day humanity will celebrate victory over displacement, confusion and evil by joining together in a heavenly meal. The theme of the play that celebrates reconciled relationships turns the tragedy of our broken world into a comedy of joy.

Endnotes

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The Critical Role of Alan Grey, the Unseen Character in Tennessee Williams’ *A Streetcar Named Desire*

PETER A. PHILLIPS

Tennessee Williams, born Thomas Lanier Williams III March 26, 1911, is considered one of American’s premier playwrights, producing a prodigious library of works over his lifetime including essays, short stories, poems, novels, and plays. As a young man his inclination was toward poetry, but he realized as he developed during his college education, that he was able to express himself and his life’s philosophy to far greater audiences through his playwriting. From the audience response to his very first produced play *Cairo, Shanghai, Bombay*, in 1935, Williams realized that playwriting was the medium he was meant to pursue. A towering theatrical accomplishment, for which he won a Pulitzer Prize and Drama Critic’s Circle Award, is his 1947 masterpiece *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

Professor and Williams Scholar Michael Paller suggests that *Streetcar*, despite “our supposed familiarity with it” (Paller: *A Room*), has often been misunderstood and its meaning misconstrued since its New York premier performance December 3, 1947. It is Paller’s contention that Allan Grey, the offstage and homosexual husband of Blanche DuBois, is at the very center of everything that happens in *Streetcar*, a fact that completely eluded nine reviewer’s critical analysis on opening night. Although three of the critics did mention that Blanche had married a gay man, none connected her behavior in the environment of her sister’s domicile in the View Carre of New Orleans to the events that occurred at Moon Lake Casino on the night Allan committed suicide. Allan’s homosexuality and its implications were never realized or appreciated by early audiences. The purpose of this paper is to complement Paller’s

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premise by demonstrating Williams's theatricality of Blanche's words and behavior underscoring her emotional attachment to her dead husband.

Paller goes on to remark that the response to a play by early reviewers is critical to popular understanding or misunderstanding, and that preconceptions are likely to harden into misconceptions that can skew a play's meaning such that what is unrecognized at the beginning of its public life, may remain unrecognized indefinitely. What may be implied initially "tends to get carved in stone about the text." (Paller, *A Room*) Linda Dorff suggests that theater critics who write for major newspapers and magazines approach plays with the assumption that all American drama is realistic, judge plays and actors by realistic standards, and render moral judgments which nearly always mirror the values and prejudices of the theater's upper middle classes. She implies the theater review is primarily to recommend that readers either buy a ticket or avoid plays. Therefore, reviews serve mostly an economic purpose. (Dorff p.9-10)

A quick review of the words written by the three critics might demonstrate Dorff's contention. Ward Morehouse wrote in the New York Sun, "A tale of two sisters well born whose plantation was lost in debt... Blanche's own marriage ended in a revolting tragedy." In the New York Harold Tribune, Howard Barnes stated, "Williams portrait of a boozy prostitute who gradually loses her mind in the Vieux Carre of New Orleans is a looming figure in the modern theater. Blanche's husband was a degenerate." Robert Garland, critic for The New York Journal American opined, "When a tiny tot back on the old plantation, her boyfriend acted kind of odd, and ran away with an older son of a rival." (Critics Review) Although words such as "degenerate" and "odd," as used by Barnes and Garland, hint at homophobia in *Streetcar*, certainly there is nothing in their complete analysis to imply homosexuality or homophobic discourse as the underlying theme in the play.

What may be gleaned from the critic's perspective are the values and prejudices of the theater's middle classes composing the Broadway environment of the 40's and 50's. David Savran in his essay, "By Coming Suddenly into a Room That I Thought Was Empty: Mapping the Closet with Tennessee Williams," describes the New York Theater of the era as being subject to strict legislative censorship that worked in complicity with the severe ideological constraints of the period. The Wales Padlock Law passed in 1927 prohibited plays which "depicted or dealt with the subject of sex degeneracy or sex perversion" from the New York stage. In the early years following the Second World War, the theater practiced stringent self-discipline, following strict repressive legislative dictates as exacted by the homophobic Lee Shubert, director of the Shubert Theater monopoly until his death in 1954. Shubert was supported whole

heartedly by the eager collusion of the Hearst Newspaper chain. (Savran 51) Therefore, it is reasonable to assume then that the critics of the 1940's-1950's were no more likely than audiences to assume a character might be gay if not specifically told so through dialogue or distinctive action. However, the critics attending the opening of *Streetcar* were all well established and knowledgeable theater practitioners in whose hands the theatrical world placed their collective reputations and futures. Paller contends that all nine critics viewed *Streetcar* as "normalizing" the behavior of the heterosexual characters as "boys will be boys" regardless of how they treated each other and their attitudes toward the female characters. (Paller: *A Room*) Their critical discourse completely ignored the significance of the offstage young gay husband of Blanche DuBois and by such ignorance missed the importance of Grey's homosexuality and its inference to Blanche's personality.

Unseen Characters

Three of Williams' best known characters are homosexuals and are never visualized on stage. Through Williams prose their attendance is strongly evoked for the audience, each playing a central role, their offstage presence a driving force of each play. They are Skipper in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Sebastian Venable in *Suddenly Last Summer*, and Allan Grey in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. (Koprince 73) For the purpose of this discussion the focus will concentrate on how Allan Grey affected Blanche's behavior and subsequent downward spiral toward madness, emphasizing Paller's suggestion that the nine New York critics reviewing the play opening night Dec. 3, 1947 missed entirely that Grey "is at the very center of everything that occurs in *Streetcar*." (Paller: *A Room*)

One might assume Williams kept the characters unseen out of concern about censorship. The Broadway theater of the 40's and 50's did not lend itself to the inclusion of an open homosexual character on stage. There were potential legal ramifications concerning the New York commercial theater's portrayal of gays and lesbians. Williams himself, never one to hide his sense of the truth, may have feared, if he was entirely honest about homosexuality, losing his fame and fortune that came with being the country's leading playwright. (Paller 109) In his short stories Williams had written candidly about gay life (*One arm, Two on a Party, Desire and the Black Masseuse, Hard Candy*), where the audience is one reader at a time. However, theater provides a more aesthetic experience than a single story, because it is live representation, suggesting more concrete reality than the written word. What might suggest realism on a written page becomes reality on stage.

Koprince (74) suggests, however, that Williams's primary motive in creating the unseen characters was to demonstrate the power of human

relationships and the effect of such power as epitomized by Blanche's precarious emotional state: "To reveal the incredible hold that one individual can have over another, even from a distance, even from the grave." (Koprince 75) Williams demonstrates how Allen's specter, held at such an incredible distance, oriented Blanche's subsequent portrayal influencing her integral moment by moment existence with the people about her.

In that Allan never appears on stage, Williams portrays him indirectly in a variety of ways. (Koprince 74) He has Blanche and Stella speak openly about him. Blanche relates that there was "something different" about her young husband—"He was a boy, just a boy....there was something different about the boy, a nervousness, a softness and tenderness which wasn't like a man's although he was not the least bit effeminate looking—still—that thing was there..." (*Streetcar*, Act 2) Stella briefly states to Stanley: "Allan was extremely good looking....[a] beautiful and talented young man who turned out to be a degenerate." (*Streetcar*, Act 3) But it is primarily through Blanche that Williams' audience derives their image of Allan.

Another method used by Williams to develop Allan's offstage presence is through sight and sound. At moments of stress throughout the play Blanche hears the music played at the Blue Moon Casino the night Allan shot himself. The Varsouviana polka runs feverishly in Blanche's mind whenever she recalls the night of his death. In response to Stanley's inquiry concerning her past marriage in Act 1, she hears the music, leaps to her feet pressing her hands against her ears. "I'm afraid I'm—going to be sick." (*Streetcar*, Act 1) Again the music is present in her head when she is rejected by Mitch's own cruelty in Act 2. "Yes, I had many intimacies with strangers. After the death of Allan—intimacies with strangers was all I seemed able to fill my empty heart with."

One other technique used by Williams to underscore the presence of his offstage characters is his use of surrogates. In *Streetcar*, Koprince (p.76) suggests that Blanche's encounter with the young newsboy reminds her of her late young husband. The newsboy described by Williams as a quiet "bashful kid" is referred to repeatedly by Blanche as "Young man"...the term young being used repeatedly to underscore the age at which Blanche fell so deeply in love with Allan. "Young man, young man, young man," Blanche says to him, "has anyone ever told you, you look like a young Prince out of the Arabian Nights?" (*Streetcar*, Act 2) And later, when describing her lost love to Mitch; "He was a boy, just a boy, when I was a young girl. When I was sixteen, I made the discovery—love." (*Streetcar*, Act 2) Like the seventeen year old student she seduced in Laurel which led to her dismissal as a teacher as well as the young soldiers at the hotel Flamingo with whom she was intimate, they were all substitutes in Blanche's mind for the shy youthful husband she lost. (Koprince p.77)

Allan Grey is not simply loved, but is emotionally idolized by Blanche. Allan's memory is so sacred to her that when Stanley finds old love letters in Blanche's trunk and attempts to read them, she snatches them away. "The touch of your hand insults them! Now that you touched them I'll burn them!" (*Streetcar*, Act 1) Stella confides to Stanley "Blanche just didn't love [Allan] but worshipped the ground he walked on! Adored him, and thought him almost too fine to be human!" (*Streetcar*, Act 3). And when Mitch shows Blanche the inscription on his cigarette case given him by a girl friend on her death bed "And if God choose/I shall but love thee better after death!" Blanche explains: "That's my favorite sonnet by Mrs. Browning!" Musing further to Mitch of her loss; "The little there is [sincerity] belongs to people who have known some sorrow." (*Streetcar*, Act 1).

In *Streetcar* the emotional problems driving Blanche's behavior are traced by Williams to the suicide of Allan. As the play progresses, Williams provides his audience the understanding of how psychologically devastating Allan's death is to Blanche, and how this dictates her subsequent overwhelming emotional response to her surroundings within the compact environment of the Kowalski household. Although suffering the loss of the family estate Belle Reve, experiencing the deaths of various family members, and finally losing her teaching position, it is Allan's suicide which has traumatized Blanche most severely. When she discovers Allan's preference for male lovers, she retaliates by denouncing Allan in public on the porch of the Blue Moon Casino. To Mitch she explains: "We danced the 'Varsouviana'...

Suddenly in the middle of the dance the boy I married broke away from me and ran out of the casino. A few moments later—a shot! He'd stuck the revolver into his mouth, and fired—so that the back of his head had been—blown away! It was because—on the dance-floor—unable to stop myself—I'd suddenly said—"I saw! I know! You disgust me." (*Streetcar*, Act 2)

Williams theatricality methodically affects an already emotionally fragile and tragic figure seeking redemption from a troubled past. As the play unfolds, an attentive audience watches with growing incredulity as Blanche attempts to conform to the Vieux Carre environment in which she finds herself, an environment foreign to the old Southern societal background of her youth. In her book *Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan*, Nancy Tischler quotes Joseph Wood Crutch when discussing the ambiguity exposed in Blanche's character.

Her instincts are right. She is on the side of civilization and refinement. But the age has placed her in a tragic dilemma. She looks about for a tradition according to which she may live and a civilization to which she can be loyal. She finds none.

Behind Blanche lies a past which seems to have been civilized. The culture of the Old South is dead, and she has good reason to know that

it is. It is, however, the only culture about which she knows anything. "The world of Stella and her husband is a barbarism, thus in this dilemma, Blanche chooses the dead past and becomes a victim of that impossible choice." Crutch states that Blanche choose this path rather than "adjust" as did her sister Stella. "At least she has not succumbed to barbarism." (Tischler, Crutch 144-145)

Signi Lenea Falk, writing in the chapter "The Southern Gentlewoman" in her book *Tennessee Williams*, shows no mercy to Blanche as Williams has written her. She quotes Mary McCarthy who states that Williams "is addicted to the embroidering lie" in his characterization of Blanche. "It is not enough that she should be a drunkard, she must also be a notorious libertine who has been run out of a small town like a prostitute, a thing absolutely inconceivable for a woman to whom conventionality is the end of existence." At the same time Williams presents to his audiences "a symbol of art and beauty, [a] poor flimsy creature to whom truth is mortal, who hates the feel of experience with a pathological aversion.... yet who has never spoken an honest word in her life, [who] is allowed, encouraged, to present herself as able to make a vocational decision, an artist's election of the beautiful, an act of supreme courage, the choice of the thorny way." (Tischler, McCarthy 86-87)

Falk appears to agree with McCarthy's assessment believing that Williams wrote overzealously in his descriptions of Blanche's pitiful condition. She compares her with Amanda in *The Glass Menagerie* as to her pretensions to gentility, her legend and stories of former gentleman caller suitors, and her habit of lying to herself and others. Falk states that many factors contributed to Blanche's insanity not the least of which her references to death-bed responsibilities, her girlhood marriage to a poet homosexual, the fear of poverty and loneliness, and her frustrated need for love and companionship. (Falk 89)

Certainly, what these scholars have described concerning Blanche's Southern background is true and vital to her ability to make the eventual choice as described by Crutch, which is not choosing barbarism. However, Williams very early sets an excruciating claustrophobic atmosphere into which Blanche stumbles when she arrives at the Kowalski doorstep, a miasmatic terror that Williams endured his whole life and appreciated well the mind set of such sufferance. Stella implores Stanley in Act 1. "And try to understand her and be nice to her, Stan. She wasn't expecting to find us in such a small place. You see, I'd tried to gloss things over a little in my letters." (Streetcar Act 1). Blanche's sense of fear of enclosure is prevalent throughout the play each time she hears the Varsouviana; from where she cries out in Act 1 "I'm going to be sick," again when telling Mitch of Allan's suicide, (*Streetcar*, Act 2) when Stanley hands Blanche

a bus ticket back to Laurel, (*Streetcar*, Act 3) and later during her last encounter with Mitch an old Mexican woman appears calling out “Flores para los muertos...” Blanche, terrified, pours out a litany of agony and sorrow: “We didn’t dare even admit we had ever heard of it...death...the opposite of Desire.” Deep within Blanche’s claustrophobic deteriorating mind, with words spoken and music heard, is Allan Grey.

Neither Tischler, Falk, and the scholars they reference suggest that the guilt of responsibility for Blanche’s husband’s suicide might be the underlying trauma that drove Blanche to the Vieux Carre seeking a form of redemption in her sister’s domain, and when facing the “heterosexist” male dominated environment so disastrously different from any she had ever known as a “southern belle,” was motivated by terror and fear of abandonment to behave in whatever way might provoke sympathy and encourage accommodation from those around her. Rather, in reading the thoughts of these writers, it might appear that their reactions infer that Blanche falling into madness was a consequence of who she was behaviorally, and thus redemption was never forthcoming.

John Gassner, an early and strong advocate of Williams’s writings in an essay entitled *Tennessee Williams: Dramatist of Frustration* stated that Williams reduced [Blanche’s] tragedy to psychopathology. “The fact that a neurosis was caused by the suicide of her young maladjusted husband is a motivation found believable only in Williams’s wild imagination. Nor is it convincing that the young husband’s death should have led her to seduce schoolchildren and take up with soldiers in a neighboring camp. The tragic history of her marriage to a young sensitive homosexual hardly gives credibility to her own destruction.” (Gassner)

Professor Gassner’s article was written toward the end of the 1940’s and reflects the homophobic societal atmosphere prevalent at the time of the play’s premier. The fact that he uses the word “maladjusted” to describe Blanche’s husband underscores that homophobic atmosphere. It is interesting that the date of Gassner’s essay, October 1948, is nine months after the original Kinsey Report, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* was published, and by fall of that year over 250,000 copies had been sold. The publisher required two presses going to keep up with the demand.

It is reasonable to suggest that by 1940, Williams, having faced and combated his own inherent homophobia and accepted his orientation by the time he sketched *Streetcar*, was able to write eloquently of what he envisioned as the cause of Blanche’s emotional instability. And by 1953, at the height of a period unprecedented in its fear, paranoia, and homophobia, Williams wrote and saw produced commercially *Camino Real*, placing on the Broadway stage for the first time an openly gay character, the Baron. (Paller 50-51)

It is my contention that Blanche, psycho pathologically tormented by the thought that it was she who drove Allan to commit suicide is emotionally incapable of making any decision that might have allowed her to ingratiate herself into the “barbarism” society described by Crutch. Blanche realizing she had rejected the person she loved most in the world, Allan, who had come to her for help and understanding, viewed herself as his murderer. (Koprince 80)

Blanche’s inability to align herself to the hostile humanistic environment in which she finds herself is heightened by her intense guilt at the suicide of her young husband. Blanche rejected Allan Grey with cruelty. And she lives with that moment. “Deliberate cruelty is not forgivable.” (*Streetcar*, Act 3) Allan’s “presence” haunts her imagination, stalking her relentlessly.

Williams utilizes the “missing” homosexual character to drive the action of the play toward its disturbing finish. When Blanche is rejected by Mitch’s own cruelty, she reacts as if seeing Allan coming after her. She hears the “Varsouviana,” the sound that Allen’s ghost whispers in her ear. At this moment her deep guilt and self-loathing is most intense. She is driven beyond hysteria into madness. Allan is present at this moment. Blanche imagines a death at sea from an unwashed grape. “And I’ll be buried at sea sewn up in a clean white sack and dropped overboard—at noon—in the blaze of summer—and into an ocean as blue as my first lover’s eyes!” (*Streetcar*, Act 3) Allan has his posthumous revenge. He has been throughout the story line of *Streetcar* the psychological foil preventing Blanche from adapting her life to the environment of the Vieux Carre. Her downward emotional spiral to insanity was inevitable.

Brooks Atkinson, Drama critic for the *New York Times*, in a follow up to his opening night review wrote eloquently of audience reaction to *Streetcar*. [The audience] “came away from it profoundly moved and also in some curious way elated. For they had been sitting all evening in the presence of truth, and that is a rare and wonderful experience. Out of nothing more esoteric than interest in human beings, Mr. Williams looked steadily and wholly into the private agony of one lost person.”

“We’re all of us sentenced to solitary confinement inside our own skins, for life.” (*Orpheus Descending*, Tennessee Williams)

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The Connection: Acting and Consciousness

J.R. MCCUTCHEON

The interconnection or accommodation of all created things to each other, and each to all the others, brings it about that each simple substance has relations that express all the others, and consequently, that each simple substance is a perpetual living mirror of the universe. Leibniz, *The Monadology* 1714

Gottfried Leibniz, a seventeenth century philosopher and mathematician, considered monads to be moments of consciousness albeit acting on *programed* instructions in the center of their *force*. In Leibniz's *Monadology* there is no separation between body and mind, mind and matter, hence the above quote which has shades of Jung's *unus mundus* suggests we are all connected to an underlying unified reality.

This article is an approach towards the inclusion of consciousness raising body energy work within the practice of actor training; to consider the physical body as though it were an energy grid within which consciousness lies, beyond the traditional concepts of physical, emotional and mental. We know from Einstein's theory of special relativity that mass and energy are different manifestations of the same thing. The equation $E=mc^2$, in which energy is put equal to mass, multiplied by the square of the velocity of light, shows that very small amounts of mass may be converted into a very large amount of energy and vice versa. Mass and energy are in fact equivalent, according to the formula mentioned above. This was demonstrated by Cockcroft and Walton in 1932. If we accept that we are indeed energy and that our energy is interconnected with beings and matter outside what we consider our *self*, questions arise as to the manner, depth, frequency and awareness with which we do interconnect. Should the actor be aware of the interconnecting energies, the *dark*

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matter between us all? Would this knowledge change, affect or enhance the quality of acting and performing?

When Fritz Zwicky coined the term “Dark Matter” in the 1930’s, he was hypothesizing that there must be a matter that kept the galaxies from flying apart as they revolved around black holes. We have since learned that he was right, that there is a matter, invisible to the eye, that does connect and *hold* everything in our galaxy together.

For neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, consciousness is the feeling associated with the relationship between a perceived object and the perceiving organism. Damasio states that consciousness is “an entirely personal and private affair, not amenable to third person observations,” (1999:82) but he also acknowledges that “all the contents in our minds are subjective and the power of science comes from its ability to verify objectively the consistency of many individual subjectivities.” (1999:83)

Damasio argues that consciousness consists of two levels: core consciousness and extended consciousness. Core consciousness occurs in a moment resulting in a sense of self about one moment (now) and one place (here). It arises from moment to moment and is constructed out of the pulses of awareness generated by changes in objects and bodily states. It’s a very simple biological phenomenon and is not exclusively human; it does not require language. The second level, extended consciousness provides the organism with an elaborate sense of self that’s based on an extensive memory and a rich sense personal history and anticipated future. Extended consciousness is built on core consciousness.

These are two qualifications of consciousness that seem to have worked well for early investigations of *organisms*. However, neither category appears to allow for ideas such as Jung’s collective unconscious or *unus mundus*, described as a “psychological event by which one becomes one with everything existing.” According to Jung, when one achieves the state of *unus mundus*, one is part of all that exists. The outer is one with the inner, and ego and consciousness become part of the collective unconscious.

Descartes’s famous saying, *cogito ergo sum*, “I think, therefore I am,” suggests that any act of thinking implies the presence of a thinker, a person, and therefore self-knowledge of personal existence is certain. Descartes divided the universe into material things, *res extensa*, that exist in space, and *res cogitas*, consciousness, a mind that thinks but has no material extension. The resulting duality of mind and body came to be known as dualism. Dualists must explain both how mind and body interact within the person despite their qualitative differences and respond to attempts to reunify mind and body in monistic philosophic systems that consider everything to be either ideal, part of immaterial consciousness,

or material, so that consciousness is part of the material world that science describes—brain states, for example.¹

So far, no-one had determined the place where consciousness exists in our body or whether animals, vegetation and minerals have consciousness. There is no clear formula for discovering systems through creative intentions and observation involving reflective and reflexive processes.

There are theories that consciousness lies in the brain, the mind, the body, the body/mind, the ether surrounding us, the soul, memes, awareness and the self. In 1739 the philosopher David Hume concluded that “the idea of a substantial self, an organized single entity called *me* did not exist.” Hume determined that *self* was a material reality made up of waves and patterns. Some might also call this consciousness.

The body is also energy, connected via unseen waves, more than physical, mental and emotional. A truthful portrayal of a character has traditionally asked the actor to answer Stanislavski’s “What If” question and to establish the physical, mental and emotional states of the character. We know from contemporary scholars such as Andrew White that “Borrowing from Yoga, Stanislavsky offers actors much more than theories about how to be more believable or psychologically realistic in their roles. He adapts specific Yogic exercises in order to help actors transcend the limitations of the physical senses and tap into higher levels of creative consciousness.”²

So the idea of a “truthful portrayal” is an elusive term – almost purely relative to the consciousness of the being perceiving the truth. The actor constantly searches within their body for essences of truth, for ways to monitor, register, define and recognize what truth is for them. Every exercise, every performance stretches the possibility of what this *truth* might be. We have embraced systems of movement such as Laban and Feldenkrais into our actor training. We have also embraced extraordinary breath work, chakras and the idea of “tremor” via Katherine Fitzmaurice’s voice work.

It has taken a long time for the kind of language once considered occult to find its place back into contemporary training systems. Academically, this language is still seen as belonging outside any serious study or investigation of the science of actor training. I can only imagine that this long term avoidance stems from past *cleansings* (including the witch hunts) of all practices of expanding consciousness beyond the established boundaries instigated by institutions such as religion, medicine and various governmental bodies. Psychology, of course, took us further, but validation of the body energies as a real and necessary part of actor training in the academy is still a long term battle.

The body is an energy grid engaged in hundreds, thousands of transactions in a moment, a day, a lifetime. Theatre allows focus on the necessary transactions, needed to tell the story. The actor is in a unique

position to select, focus, enlighten and manifest these. In previous articles and in my book, *Awakening the Performing Body*, I focus on the idea of interpreting the body energy matter via chakras as body energy centers. It made great sense to use a system centuries old through which to articulate and train the engagement of the body energy grid.

The chakra centers provide a *home base* for more specific attention to this body energy grid. If, for example the attention coming from the mind or third eye in the body is focused on a conversation, it is often the case that the rest of the body energies – which are active – will go unnoticed by the attention in the mind. Possibly psychology has placed these aspects into the term “sub conscious” or “unconscious,” largely because the site of “attention” – in this case the mind – is not engaged with the other sites on the energy grid. In different systems of religion and spirituality, the mind is quietened so that another aspect of self can be heard. This *other* aspect of self is a very hard thing to name in such a way that everyone understands what we are referring to. So I will do my best to open up the idea of this *other* self beyond the traditional mind. The following words and descriptions all have some part in its identity, the body/mind, the higher self, the soul, the connection to the highest being, the center of self and of course you will have many terms for this also. So if we are an energy grid, is there another *self* beyond the mind which is also energy? What if the grid that makes up our *body* is connected and interfaced with the rest of the world, how could we then have a center or how are we connected?

This is beyond an idea of a body/mind. I am talking about a responsibility of consciousness, of being aware that everything I do without a doubt will affect everyone around me. The self beyond the mind is a huge connectivity to the earth, to everyone, to the universe; it's a massive concept, and I hasten to say not a new one. One of the problems of locking in these concepts to a single body is that we must be restricted to a separate, individual view of the world which constantly rests itself in opposition, comparison, competition and difference. Whereas to acknowledge and accept the idea of self as being a *component* of a much larger energy grid, leaves us feeling connected with everything and everyone although somewhat powerless despite the seemingly endless power supply.

The concept of attention has been a key idea in actor training, and there are many ways of interpreting this term. For the purpose of this article attention is the gathering of forces to illuminate a point of focus. If we consider the physical body as though it were a system of energy, interconnected and intra-connected, then the idea of *attention* becomes reliant upon the amount of focused *energy* the body is releasing. The quality of attention we might assume is then qualified by the section of the body energy grid the attention is coming from. The sections of the body energy grid have particular qualities of energy - not qualities that

scientists would necessarily define, rather qualities that humanists and artists might necessarily define. As energy masses we are connected to everything else that is energy, we are breathing the same air right now; how can I not be connected to you?

The nature of acting demands an expanded awareness wherein one is watching the other via the focused attention of the audience. This focused attention provides an etheric body of sorts (dark matter?) through which the actor can *imaginatively re-view* their own bodies in the act of being a character engaged in another story. This multi-level consciousness is commonplace in the actor's experience. It is taken for granted that there are many kinds of consciousness at work as the processes of actor training and rehearsal provide the actor with the opportunity to experience different levels of altered consciousness. For example, the Polish director and actor trainer, Jerzy Grotowski, pushed his actors past fatigue levels with grueling physical work – often without a break during a 24 hour period. The actors would experience a very altered state of consciousness and then rehearse their character in this altered state. My own experience in the International Research Theatre KISS in Holland from 1980 to 1982 consisted of Grotowski-like training for 4-6 hours every day. Four of our members had been trained by Grotowski and one had been with him for 5 years. During the rehearsals and training for a 24 hour show based on Dante's *Divine Comedy*, we worked for 24 hour periods at a time preparing rituals and devised pieces based on the 7 deadly sins. Some of this training was more army like than creative, although it certainly raised consciousness and as a result created some powerful theatre. At the same time, I have witnessed rituals by indigenous groups I've visited that produced similar results without this kind of training. Both experiences produced a heightened awareness that facilitated a connectivity between all people present. This is a truth that needs more light.

The actor trainer Michael Chekhov wrote in his book *On the Technique of Acting*,

Our artistic natures have two aspects: one that is merely sufficient for our ordinary existence and another of a higher order that marshals the creative powers in us.³

Chekhov was still distinguishing between two different types of consciousness, when he writes further, "Creating anew is possible for the actor only if he has found the way to free his Higher Ego and to experience the Divided Consciousness."⁴

Stanislavski had a slightly different approach to this idea of a divided consciousness, he writes,

Let me remind you of our cardinal principle: Through conscious means we reach the subconscious.⁵ In the soul of a human being there are certain

elements which are subject to consciousness and will. These accessible parts are capable in turn of acting on psychic processes which are involuntary.⁶

I think it's true that everyone, actor or not, experiences awareness of several *minds* or voices operating at once; however, the actor is always concerned with an external other site of consciousness, that of the audience. Could this then mean the consciousness of the actor, the character and the audience are all at work in the same space? Does the audience respond and react to whether the actor is in her self-consciousness or that of the character or even extended out into the consciousness of the audience? I suspect the audience does respond to these different states of consciousness and are themselves in a shared state of consciousness, where the *self* has merged towards the idea of Jung's *unus mundus*. As the actor is watching himself on stage alternating in and out of the different minds, so the audience is watching the actor and alternating in and out of their daily self and transformed self. The transformed self is the result of focused engagement with the actors and the story, one where the audience member is *taken away* from the daily self into an imaginary world existing as part of a secret bond between the actors and the audience. A bond that, if fully engaged with, has the power to transform both parties.

Stanislavski wrote in his book *An Actor Prepares*, in 1936,

Besides listening I want you now to try to absorb something vital from your partner. In addition to the conscious, explicit discussion and intellectual exchange of thoughts, can you feel a parallel interchange of currents, something you draw in through your eyes and put out again through them? It is like an underground river, which flows continuously under the surface of both worlds and silences and forms an invisible bond between subject and object.

Stanislavsky explored in depth these ideas of transferring forces via the notion of *communion* in his book, spending an entire chapter on descriptions, exercises and images in an attempt to explain the interchange of currents. Getting back to the idea of dual mind consciousness and Damasio's idea that consciousness is the feeling associated with the relationship between a perceived object and the perceiving organism, theatre then is an ideal petri dish for the analysis of such exchanges to be interrogated. Can we limit ourselves to these ideas of Core and Extended, Mind and Body, when there is a larger etheric web connecting all of this?

While both Damasio and Descartes are only two of many thinkers who have deeply influenced the way we interpret and understand consciousness today, they seem determined to locate consciousness within the body or the mind. In his book *Staging Consciousness*, William Demastes writes about the "stage's language of rhythms of consciousness"⁷ and discusses theatre as a "process of attempting to rewire the human neural network."⁸

We know from the information gathered by anthropologists on shamanic rituals that shamans typically journey into altered states with full awareness. This comes close to a deep exploration of self into the energy grid and being aware of all the connections. An altered state can often occur during performance rituals in indigenous societies; sometimes this state is also referred to as trance.

Joseph Campbell, author of *Hero with a Thousand Faces* and best known for his work on comparative myth and religion, suggests that once we understand the brain is a secondary organ serving the higher organ of the body, then we can get on with learning to listen and trust the information coming from the higher organ, the body. The brain is capable of running the body, but shamanic consciousness is capable of retraining the mind and freeing the body/mind, thereby giving it equal voice. Listening to the body is not easy, when an actor is overloaded with text, blocking, costumes, sets and of course, direction. Time must be taken to slow the process of developing the character and finding the story. The actor needs to learn ways of seeing and hearing their body as an elaborate energy system that is deeply connected to everyone and everything else.

Everywhere we look we see actors representing us on screen, radio and stage. From Freud to Jung to Maslow and Rogers we know that we transfer and project our reality and conceptions of self onto others. If we do this unthinkingly, then it makes sense that we do this to actors as well as we see ourselves playing those roles, living through the vessel of a particular actor. If the actor is not undergoing any training or exploration of the depths of being, then we will always be limited to that actor's idea of reality. If the actor has investigated and developed extra levels of self through extreme focus on the self, then it is my understanding that we as audience will benefit from this.

If an actor steps onto the stage with the sense of the audience being a part of their energy, that the floor, air and sounds are all connected, I believe it is impossible to have a dual mind consciousness, because being *present* leaves no room for another self. Peter Brooks, when describing an aspect of Holy theatre talks about the need for each member of the audience to fall into a sympathetic rhythm with each other and the actors, stating that "an event will occur only if each one of these individual instruments become attuned. Then all you need for something to happen is a single vibration to pass through the auditorium."⁹

The auditorium becomes a site of collective consciousness, where invisible energies of life forces intermingle, interact and connect. The connecting medium between bodies, whatever we may call it, can be affected by our thoughts, state of awareness and consciousness. In some

ways the actors and audience become part of one dynamic network in which many feelings, thoughts and awarenesses are shared. The idea of *becoming one* with everything in our space embraces not only the present but also all that has gone before.

Grotowski wrote the passage below about ethnodrama (a form of storytelling he was working on with the actors in his Lab). The process involved a creative regression, a reaching back to origins using traditional folk songs as the focus and content. I find the description very evocative and would like to share. For me, it supplies a vivid image of shamanic consciousness and gives a great example of the kind of experimental work and philosophy of Jerzy Grotowski:

In this field one of the tests is a kind of individual ethnodrama, in which the starting point is an old song linked to the ethnic-religious tradition of the person in question. One begins to work with this song as if in it was codified in potentiality (movement, action, rhythm), a totality. It's like an ethnodrama in the collective traditional sense, but here it is one person who acts with one song and alone.

...As I said before, this type of work passes through moments of crisis.... You must face all of the classical questions of the performing arts. For example: But who is the person who sings the song? Is it you? But if it is a song from your grandmother, is it still you? But if you are discovering in you your grandmother, through your body's impulses, then it's neither you nor your grandmother who had sung: it's you exploring your grandmother who sings. Yet it can be that you go further back, toward some place, toward some time difficult to imagine, when for the first time someone sang this song. I'm speaking about a true traditional song, which is anonymous. We say: It's the people who sang. But among these people, there was someone who began. You have the song, you must ask yourself where this song began.¹⁰

Actor training can and should continue to embrace training methods that work towards raising the consciousness of actors, just as the actor trainers of their time worked for a greater understanding of the self and all that is it and isn't through the vital engagement of theatre. We should not be afraid of exploring states of consciousness through actor training or of embracing ancient ways of connecting to higher – other – expanded parts of self. The way we train actors affects their ability to reflect the many dimensions of our humanity and our potential back to us. If there is no *inner* work, no sense of sacred or ritual, are we limiting the art form and denying the call of our predecessors who created the approaches to actor training we still use today? The System, The Method, Barba's Theatre Anthropology, Artaud's Theater of Cruelty, Grotowski's impulse work and Paratheatre have all been asking the questions about consciousness, energy and matter, altered states and connectivity – it's

all very exciting, academic in its research and pure nature. It must be time to start dedicating some resources to an Actor's Lab where actor trainers, actors, psychologists, philosophers and scientists can work on exploring this very elusive concept of consciousness via the actor's body and the act of theatre.

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Endnotes

- 1 "Consciousness – Overview – Consciousness In Modern Philosophy" – science.jrank.org/pages/8790/Consciousness-Overview-Consciousness-in-Modern-Philosophy.html#ixzz0Fhtqg8NR&A
- 2 White, A. "Stanislavsky and Ramacharaka: The Influence of Yoga and Turn-of-the-Century Occultism on the System."
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Design Thinking and the Creative Process

ROBERT MARK MORGAN

Advocacy for Design Thinking and the Creative Process in Higher Education

In the theatre, we seem to be always analyzing our audience in an ongoing effort to provide theatrical offerings that they are more likely to want to see on our stages than not. What can we glean about them that will translate into box office success? What moves them? What will get them to purchase a ticket and see a show?

At least in the academic sense, one could argue that we know virtually everything we need to know about our *audience*: the students. After all, we *accepted* them into the university. We know a great deal about the ones we've invited to study here. From test scores to extracurricular activities to student group positions served, we have a mountain of data that tells us who they are and, more than likely, the type of student they will be.

The students enrolled at most universities are *ultimate* rule-followers, as it is the rule-followers who, after all, are the ones who have learned what data their teachers and parents want them to know, and who can demonstrate a grasp of that data at any given time. Like a thoroughbred groomed for a race from birth, students tend to be highly trained to provide the perfect answer at the appropriate time and without hesitation. In truth, the advent and proliferation of standardized testing has created an illusion of a clear right answer – always. We know that this is simply not true, and that the world is full of nuance and a universe of gray answers in between the black and white.

We know everything about university students that we need to know when it comes to their academic abilities: how well did they do on the SAT, ACT and IQ tests. We know all that. But what about the rest?

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- a. Are they able to collaborate in diverse groups? Are they able to coalesce around a problem, brainstorm ideas and attempt to solve it collectively?
- b. How do they handle constraints on time, resources and budgets?
- c. How do they handle adversity? Ambiguity? Uncertainty? Failure?
- d. Do they consider themselves creative, and do they apply that creativity to their areas of study, discipline and interactions?

Take *failure*, for example: most students would shudder at the thought. Why would they need to know how to handle, recover and learn from failure and, even if they did, why would they admit it? It might make them look weak.

Students fear the risk that comes with individuality. They would rather opt for achieving and performing than straying from the norm. From all of the training toward academic perfection, one factor remains key to recognize about students– they are risk *averse*, and they fear one word almost more than any other: *failure*.

Compare that view of failure with the views of failure by some of the most accomplished artists, innovators and professionals of our age:

“Ninety-nine percent of success is built on failure.” – Charles Kettering

“You miss 100 percent of the shots you never take.” – Wayne Gretzky

“Do not fear mistakes. There are none.” – Miles Davis

“The way to succeed is to double your failure rate.” – Thomas Watson, IBM founder

“I have not failed once. I’ve just found 10,000 ways that didn’t work.”
– Thomas Edison

“Only those who dare to fail greatly can ever achieve greatly.”
– Robert F. Kennedy

“The greatest artists like Dylan, Picasso, and Newton risked failure. And if we want to be great, we’ve got to risk it too.” – Steve Jobs

The advent and proliferation of standardized testing as a means of quantifying, separating and assessing students has created an illusion of a clear right answer – always. This line of thinking is valuable as a metric to compare and select students for enrollment, but it also has a tendency to overlook a large portion of who we are and who are students are: our *creative* selves.

I fully recognize that universities are blessed with some of the brightest and most gifted young adults in the country: students who excel in studies and absorb information like sponges. Likewise, they are part of a generation of youth who have grown up with electronic devices in their hands that consistently have them looking down into a screen rather than up-and-out to a world that surrounds them. Many of them deal with growing challenges in interpersonal skills and are rarely asked to

collaborate actively and build upon the ideas of fellow classmates: a skill that applies to virtually all disciplines they may choose to pursue.

To steal an idea (something all artists do) from William Deresiewicz's new book, *Excellent Sheep*, we must not only provide students with the data but must make every effort to give them the software to do something *with* that data.

But here is the good news: **ALL** students and adults alike already possess creative abilities but rarely know how to apply them to the challenges and tasks that they face.

That's where training in the arts comes in.

In recent years, innovation and creative thinking have become the catch phrases in the private and public sector of our economy. The days of the CEO as rock star are over. More and more, companies recognize that they need diverse teams of individuals that can build upon ideas and collaborate with others in advancing these ideas. They want "people who can think intuitively, who are imaginative and innovative, who can communicate well, work in teams and are flexible, adaptable, and self-confident" (Ken Robinson).

From companies large and small, from start-ups to established corporate entities, businesses have recognized the same thing that our own students recognize to just get INTO university: they need to stand out. They need *an edge*.

Can the arts help us understand and grasp the uncertainties that inevitably crop up in ANY discipline?

Can training and instruction in creative and collaborative abilities give our students an *edge*?

The short answer is YES.

In both study and practice, a gateway approach to education can empower students to harness their creative and collaborative abilities in the three ways:

1. Defining themselves as creative and identifying their creative strengths and weaknesses.
2. Comprehensive study of and, in some cases, discussion with creatives from all disciplines including artists, innovators, and educators.
3. Teaching students to develop into innovators who are unafraid to ask stupid questions, propose crazy ideas, and (when necessary) fail.

As artists *and* educators we must focus on giving students both the freedom and a safe venue to experiment with ideas that they glean from discussion on topics that simultaneously empower them to voice an opinion and debate those opinions with professors and classmates alike. We must

offer an environment where creativity, stupid questions and crazy ideas are both encouraged and embraced. Creativity must be considered a valuable goal, and one that leads to lateral thinking and innovative ideas.

Perhaps it can be found in a chemistry class...a chemistry class of *ideas*.

"The way to get good ideas is to get lots of ideas and throw the bad ones away." – Linus Pauling

Design Thinking and Creative Process should exist as a special hybrid between the study of theories on the concepts of creativity and collaboration and the actual *practice* of those theories.

"A designer has one foot in imagination and one in craft." – Brian Collins

Design Thinking and the Creative Process cannot exist with the study of various theories on the creative process as its sole component. As a designer does, the study of design must swing between conceiving of ideas and trying them out in order to engender confidence in the student. An effective approach to design education should alternatively swing from the study of some of the great artistic thinkers and designers of our time to the actual collaboration and practice amongst the other participating students as a means of testing the creative tools and ideas they've just studied. This type of dance with uncertainty of one's ideas is evident in all aspects of scientific thought and no less so in university education.

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